

Conflicts of planetary proportions – a conversation*

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Opening remarks from the authors

This contribution is in the form of a conversation. Latour initiates it by presenting some critical thoughts on different regimes of planetarity with a view to asking if philosophies of history are any use today. He formulates his thoughts by way of response to a paper entitled “The Planet: An Emergent Humanist Category” that Chakrabarty published in 2019 in the journal *Critical Inquiry*. Chakrabarty, in turn, responds to Latour’s response to which Latour supplies a Coda. When we decided to write something together for this special issue on philosophies of history, we realized that our desire to do so arose from the history of an actual and ongoing conversation in which we have been engaged for a while.¹ This essay, both formally and substantially, seeks to take that conversation forward into a discussion of planetarity and the consequent obsolescence of philosophies of history, a discussion in which where the lines of our respective trajectories of thought intersect and interweave in multiple ways.

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¹ Previous instances of our conversations may be found in oral and published forms: “Bruno Latour and Dipesh Chakrabarty: Geopolitics and ‘Facts’ of Climate Change,” available as a *Critical Inquiry* podcast; and Dipesh Chakrabarty and Bruno Latour, “The Global Reveals the Planetary,” in Bruno Latour and Peter Weibel (eds), *Critical Zones: The Science and Politics of Landing on Earth* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2020).

Who needs a philosophy of history? Bruno Latour

As one of those baby “boomers” booed by the younger climate generations, I can be forgiven for my initial misunderstanding of the shape of this Anthropocene Study Group logo (Figure 1.) as Jan Zalasiewicz flashed it on the lecture hall screen² on the occasion of the launching of his new edited book: *The Anthropocene as a Geological Unit*.³ It had the hallmarks of what I had witnessed countless times in the past when managers, heads of states, developers and tycoons had celebrated the achievements of this or that economy, of this or that company.



Figure 1. Drawn by Jan Zalasiewicz. Modified from the logo of the AWG.

“Growth” – that was what this ascending line used to proclaim. Except that, this time, June 2019, at this place, Leicester University, it signaled growth for sure, but not the exponential growth of “goods”, rather the fabulous

² Jan Zalasiewicz modified from the logo of the AWG. “The horizontal line indeed represents not just the Holocene but 8000 years of the late Pleistocene too, and those slight waves on the left part of the horizontal line represent changes around the Pleistocene-Holocene epoch boundary – quite subdued compared with the rocket-like line of the Anthropocene! The line as a whole represents the rate of change of growth in atmospheric carbon dioxide levels, as superbly compiled by Clément Poirier” (personal communication).

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expansion of “bads” (in Ulrich Beck’s parlance). That this accelerating curve – the marker both of what is now called the Great Acceleration and the Anthropocene – could be so quickly turned from the harbinger of prosperity to the greatest threat ever visited upon world history, made me dizzy. Just like those Gestalt switches of foreground and background that made you see a rabbit where there is a duck – or the opposite, this logo focuses the attention exactly where lies the problem of interpreting how the twentieth century has interpreted itself – and where we stand now.

The reason I think this logo is a good starting point is that, although it is hard to define exactly what is meant by “philosophy of history”, it is possible to get at the question indirectly by looking for mistakes civilizations might have made in understanding the direction of their destiny. As such, the philosophy of history might be unfathomable, but when people realize how deeply wrong they were in their understanding of what happened to them, the violence of this revision will bring the nature of interpreting history into sharp focus. And indeed, for most people who had expected growth, development and progress of entire nations, the “take off” did occur, except that (and this is the Gestalt switch), the ascending plane, stalled in mid-air, is now heading toward a massive crash.

So, I don’t want to tackle head on what is meant by a philosophy of history, but rather why the civilization who invented, as far as I can see, the very idea that *there should be* a philosophy of history to make sense of their drive, was unable to produce the level of reflexivity needed to detect in time why it went so badly astray. Is there something wrong in the notion of “having” a philosophy of history? Even more troubling: could this civilization’s blindness actually be caused in part by the very idea of “having” a philosophy of history? These are the questions I’d like to raise in this note before the question is tackled by Dipesh Chakrabarty, a genuine historian and much more conversant than I on “historical thinking and the human,” the topic of this special issue.

The background of my piece is that Chakrabarty’s introduction of the Planetary triggered a seism in philosophy of history: if the Planetary emerges so late then all the other moments of what used to be called “history” are taking place on a ground that has lost its stability.⁴ Neither the World, nor the Globe, nor the Earth, nor the Global – to take a few of the steps he recorded – are actually the places where humans reside. Hence the deep suspicion projected backward as to why the distance separating the places the Moderns inhabited from those they *thought* they were inhabiting was not recognized

⁴ Dipesh Chakrabarty, “The Planet: An Emergent Humanist Category”, *Critical Inquiry* 46 (1), 2019, 1–31.

earlier. A deep source of inauthenticity is revealed every time we engage more thoroughly in the Anthropocene. Geohistory breaks down any claim to have a human-oriented history. Hence the new ground for critique that is provided by realizing we live in the well named *critical zone*.⁵ Just at the time that critique had lost its steam, the simple fact of being violently transported onto the critical zone gave a new edge to a ferocious revision of Modernity. The civilization that had claimed to be the discoverer of the world was now dispersed over many incommensurable “planets” – the Planetary being one of the names for our present situation.⁶ The aim of this piece and of Chakrabarty’s response is to give a spatial and geopolitical ground to counteract the notion of the arrow of time implied so far by traditional philosophies of history.

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In a very thoughtful essay on the US 2016 election, Andrew Bacevich might help me to introduce one of the first reasons it is so difficult to stabilize views such as Zalasiewicz’s logo, especially when you think you are progressing forward!⁷ These are the times when the duck might become a rabbit more than once. Bacevich recalls what happened after the miraculous year of 1989 when the Berlin Wall fell:

Winning the cold war brought Americans face-to-face with a predicament comparable to that confronting the lucky person who wins the lottery: hidden within a windfall is the potential for monumental disaster. Putting that money to good use while avoiding the pitfalls inherent in suddenly acquired riches calls for prudence and self-awareness – not easily demonstrated when the big house, luxury car and holiday home you have always wanted are yours for the asking.

⁵ Bruno Latour and Peter Weibel (eds), *Critical Zones: The Science and Politics of Landing on Earth* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2020).

⁶ I use planets in the plural as a concept allowing me to underline that the diversity of planets is not just a multiplicity of views on the same body, and also to play with the many ways they have to attract and repulse one another. It’s a way to handle diversity and war, away from the figures of universality borrowed from geography. Chakrabarty’s use of the word Planetary is redeployed here to register the multiplicity of planets at war. In his response, he will add another “planetary regime” to use Christophe Bonneuil’s term.

⁷ Andrew Bacevich, “Freedom Without Constraints: How the US Squandered its Cold War Victory”, *The Guardian*, 7 January 2020. Available at: <https://www.theguardian.com/news/2020/jan/07/freedom-without-constraints-how-the-us-squandered-its-cold-war-victory> (accessed 12 June 2020).

Hence his punch line: “The US wasted little time in squandering the advantages it had gained by winning the cold war”! As Bacevich notes:

The way it ended – with euphoric young Germans dancing on the wall – imparted to the entire cold war a retrospective moral clarity that it did not deserve. The cold war tainted everything it touched. As an episode in world history, it was a tragedy of towering proportions. So its passing ought to have called for reflection, remorse, repentance, even restitution. Yet the prevailing mood allowed for none of these, at least as far as most Americans were concerned. Instead, out of an era punctuated throughout by anxiety and uncertainty came a sense that a dazzling future lay just ahead. (Emphasis added.)

The reason I am so interested in this interpretation of the US “victory” is that, at the very same time, I took the opposite line than that of American commentators. I wrote *We Have Never Been Modern* with the certainty that the great events of 1989 marked the final defeat of both the ideal of Western social liberalism and the idea of escaping from the constraints of nature.⁸ If I was sure of one thing it was that “a sense that a dazzling future lay just ahead” would lead nowhere. Needless to say, my version of those events remained totally marginal at the time, while that of the American empire pushed what is now called the Great Acceleration into overdrive. But at least the book I wrote gives me some ground to doubt the direction taken after this fateful date without being accused of retrospective wisdom, the sin of “whiggish history” we all fought against in the past (more on this later).

Although in his essay, and later in his book, Bacevich is interested in the conception of freedom that, according to him, has perverted the American psyche, I am more interested in the call for “reflection, remorse, repentance and even restitution” not explored by him. That call is precisely the one I was pointing at in my own version of the great event: in 1989, the ecological crisis was ruining the idea of capitalism just as surely as capitalism had won over communism. How could this have been missed at the time? Interestingly, even forty years later, Bacevich himself could still miss the cause of the crisis he so perceptively tried to diagnose, ignoring entirely the ecological mutation that is behind all the shifts in political positions that have occurred since this event?⁹ And yet, the interesting point in his argument is that something else had been out of joint in the interpretation of the period, something that had been

⁸ Bruno Latour, *We Have Never Been Modern*, transl. Catherine Porter (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1993 [original French version 1991]).

⁹ As I argued in Bruno Latour, *Down to Earth: Politics in the New Climatic Regime*, transl. Catherine Porter (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2018).

hidden “by a retrospective moral clarity that it did not deserve”: the lack of a habitable Earth.

This is the clue that I’d like to pursue in large part because of another remark, one made by Pierre Charbonnier in his important book *Abondance et liberté*, a work which tells the story of how political philosophy has ignored the environmental conditions it was nonetheless thriving from.¹⁰ His interpretation of why the ecological and the socialist tradition failed to meet during the twentieth century ends with his summary:

One of the most important phenomena of modernity is at play in this shift, which can be summarized as follows: political ecology has lost a century – that is to say, about the time it took for a sense of justice articulated in the sense of environmental relations to be recomposed outside the zone of attraction of conservatism.¹¹

Political ecology has lost a century! Here again an excess of “moral clarity” (the importance given to the issues of nature) has made it impossible to connect ecological issues with those occurring in the more traditional domain of social justice. On the side of nature, just as on the side of society, it seems impossible to “get” what happens in the historical drive you pursue. Which is just the systematic – even constitutional – *organization of ignorance* that I had diagnosed in my symmetric anthropology: just like the White Man in movies, “Modern folks have a forked tongue”. Contrary to Bacevich, Charbonnier is perfectly aware that there is no longer any interpretation of freedom that can be divorced from that characterizing the territory those “free subjects” occupy. However, he does concur with Bacevich that you can misinterpret your victories to the point that you end up losing a whole century, with the result that it is too late to redress the mistakes.

It just happens that this argument of winning and yet failing to be aware of “episodes in world history” that result in “tragedies of towering proportions” might be the definition of the twentieth century when you consider its inability to understand what it took as its progressive movement. This at least is the rather provocative statement I wish to start from. If the preceding century has been very unfairly called “*le stupide dix-neuvième siècle*”, it

¹⁰ Pierre Charbonnier, *Abondance et liberté. Une histoire environnementale des idées politiques* (Paris: La Découverte, 2020).

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 285 (my translation).

is for the twentieth that a much stronger adjective should be found.¹² The “lost century”? The “infinitely perverse century”?

The reason of looking for a damning qualification is that if I push the argument of both Bacevich and Charbonnier a bit further, I notice that three times – in 1918 (the Versailles Treaty), in 1945 (the end of the new Thirty Years war) and in 1989 (the victory over the Soviet Union) – an excess, or rather a tsunami of “moral clarity,” has every time made the winners misconstrue the situation they had managed to achieve.

The 1918 episode is well known and has been analyzed many times: the victory of the allies has been construed as a moral victory against an enemy which, in the famous words of Carl Schmitt, had ceased to be a “*justus hostis*”, and was henceforth to be treated as “*inimicus*”, that is, a morally flawed criminal, rather than an enemy, thus triggering a universal moralization of international power that blinded nations states to the possibility of their own moral failure.¹³ The First World War had generated a novel idea of the global horizon, but entirely failed to let the “Planetary”¹⁴ emerge as such: yes it was a world war, but the planet was still taken as a single checkerboard for human players.

Witness the amazing blindness of eminent minds like Teilhard de Chardin intuiting the emergence of the “noosphere” in the killing fields of Douaumont, but failing to see what the “spirit” could actually do to the geology of the globe that, as a paleontologist, he otherwise knew so well.¹⁵ To detect in the two world wars the shape of the arrow leading to the “Omega Point”, is to manifest a blindness to the status of the Earth of really planetary proportion!

The same misattribution took place again in 1945 when the victory of freedom over wickedness was thought to be the main conclusion of the Second World War. Even if it is true that the ways in which the Nazis had waged the war, provided by contrast an excess of “moral clarity” to those who had defeated them and offered the victors permission, once again, to become unaware of the real situation the war had triggered. We know that what is

¹² The title turned into a cliché, is from a book by the very reactionary writer, Léon Daudet, with the following subtitle “*exposés des insanités meurtrières qui se sont abattues sur la France depuis 130 ans*”.

¹³ The superficiality of a recent piece in *The New York Review of Books* (Tamsin Shaw, “William Barr: The Carl Schmitt of Our Time”, 15 January 2020) associating Trumpists with Schmitt is due to the abandoning of that most crucial distinction between *hostis* and *inimicus*. An abandonment which is itself an effect of Trumpism!

¹⁴ I use “Planetary” in the meaning of Chakrabarty, before having to split it in two different ontologies, the Anthropocene – the Earth System known by science – and the Terrestrial – with the politics of life forms added to it.

¹⁵ Pierre Teilhard de Chardin, *Le cœur de la matière* (Paris: Seuil, 1976.)

called the Anthropocene started just at the time when the victory of Freedom over Tyranny was celebrated – with the atomic mushroom in the background. As my mother, who claimed to have been through three Franco-German wars, would have said, it is true that Germans had been the ideal “*inimicus*” since they somewhat pushed their wickedness fairly far! It was too easy to conclude that if you had won over Evil you were actually a force for the Good.

But as Bacevich rightly argues, the worst was still to come in 1989, when this time it was the utter wickedness of the Soviet regime that gave the winners a complete dispensation from thought and made them jettison any call for “reflection, remorse, repentance, even restitution”. Except this time, what was vaguely excusable after the horrors that were finally concluded in 1918 and 1945, was not excusable in 1989, in the midst of the full surge of the Great Acceleration. Because, by this time, all the alerts had been ringing loud and clear. By then everybody who would listen knew that another history was at work, one totally unrelated to a “take off”.

If my gross characterization of the twentieth century is accepted at least for the sake of the argument, the danger of having a philosophy of history begins to show up. Is it not precisely this idea of “going somewhere” or “moving forward” or “leaving the past behind”, of being “finally emancipated”, that cut one by one all the roots of reflexivity, disarmed the alarms, and rendered the “winners” more and more “unaware” as time passed? It’s most likely that having a philosophy of history is a pose; that there is nothing so grandiose in the march of time and certainly nothing like some call for humans to realize a plan, a *telos*, a drive toward some Omega Point. The idea of a challenge delivered to some humans to take up the vocation of being the “agent of history” might be the very cause of this infection of blindness that marked the past century and opened up the tragedy of this one: the excess of moral clarity having turned into a pretext for doing nothing in face of the climate mutation. The nineteenth century might have been “stupid”, but better stupid than wholly distracted.

The question is not to decide what is a good or a bad philosophy of history, but to detect when they blind themselves by the idea of a goal-oriented history that has triggered a form of (in)voluntary ignorance about the real state of the Earth. If this is the case, then the history of the former centuries is not that of increasing awareness so as to become ever more reflexive – the official history of an ever more scrupulous, more rational modernity – but a succession of episodes of growing negligence about the question of where the Moderns lived

and where they were headed. The few episodes I am going to pinpoint in my admittedly simplified chronology, are like so many cases of what physicians call *superinfection*, situations in which an infectious disease creates the condition for another even more severe bout of immunological disruption. In this strange exercise of fictitious planetology, I will outline three different “planets” that should not be mixed together. “Planet” is used here to avoid the false impression that they are simply different views of the same planet, namely the physical globe on which we were supposed to live.

Although it's the most recent in time, the first episode I point out is also the best documented. It is now clear that between 1989 and 2000 something happened that was wholly unprecedented in the organization of our blindness: this conflation of deregulation, explosion of inequalities and what was later called climate negationism – the starting point of my little tract *Down to Earth*. Although his overall interpretation is disputable, Nathaniel Rich's detailed inquiry shows very clearly that ignorance of the climate mutation was intensely *manufactured* from the Reagan administration onward before becoming official policy, ending up in what is now the hallmark of US policy (followed by that of Brazil, Australia, Russia, etc.).¹⁶ The invention of “weaponized uncertainty” is clearly a new twist of how you distribute awareness and denial.¹⁷ It is only if you are well aware of a lot of bad news that you have to deny them so fiercely. A clear case of *superinfection* – too much awareness, too much investment in denial – that was probably not activated before the period of the 1990s. This is the time when the idea that we don't actually live on the same planet takes a more literal meaning: there is still a take-off, there is still growth, there is still a cornucopia, but *only on one of the planets*, the one that is headed out into some infinite space, while on the others, everybody else, is “left behind”.¹⁸ Although it claims to be maintaining exactly the call of history as it was (“up to Mars!”), it is actually a decision to abandon any connection with history.¹⁹ For this reason, let's call such a planet, “Exit”.

¹⁶ Rich, in a clear case of “whiggish history”, implies that governments could have acted at the time, which is strange since he demonstrates how everything was done not to act at the time... Nathaniel Rich, *Losing Earth: A Recent History* (New York: MCD/Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2019).

¹⁷ The expression comes from Felicity Lawrence, “Truth Decay: When Uncertainty is Weaponized”, *Nature* 578, 2020, 28–9.

¹⁸ This is the point where Chakrabarty will introduce in his response a “different planetary body” that he calls *Emancipation*, that is the prolongation of the modernist project but in the East, see below.

¹⁹ On answering the call of history out of season, see my comment on Carl Schmitt's *Dialog on New Space*. Bruno Latour, “How to Remain Human in the Wrong Space? A Comment on a Dialog by Carl Schmitt”, *Critical Inquiry* (forthcoming).



Figure 2. Two incommensurable planets meeting in the UN, 23 September 2019, REUTERS / Andrew Hofstetter, 2019

In spite of the many resemblances underlined by postcolonial studies, the situation was very different in the earlier episode, when in mid-nineteenth century the input “of coal and colonies” – to take up Kenneth Pomeranz’ famous summary – gave European countries an edge they did not expect, and that seemed to justify their claim to be for real “the agent of history”.²⁰ Another case of “moral clarity” offering the “winners” a great occasion to misrepresent their destiny!

And yet the “disinhibition” that Jean-Baptiste Fressoz identifies as characterizing this period is deeply different from the mixture of awareness, denial and flight to infinity that I just emphasized.²¹ People at the time saw very well the awful consequences of their drive toward development, modernization, industrialization and colonization, but they decided that the “call of history” justified passing over the dangers when they were compared to the glorious future that had been opened up. There was a future clearly different from the past, and the decision to proceed was made through a sort of rough cost/benefit analysis. I know this is a hugely simplified version and that opposite moves could be detected everywhere in the same period, but I need to insist on how different the situation is from today, when the costs and the stagnation are for the *multitudes* stuck down under, while the future as well as the benefits are for those able to fly away to planet Exit. The distribution of “goods” and “bads” are entirely different.²²

²⁰ Kenneth Pomeranz, *The Great Divergence: China, Europe, and the Making of the Modern World Economy* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2000).

²¹ Jean Baptiste Fressoz, *L'Apocalypse joyeuse. Une histoire du risque technologique* (Paris: Seuil, 2012).

²² A parallel undertaking by Christophe Bonneuil on different “planetary regimes” is much more precise on the multiplicity of countercurrents marking every period, see Christophe Bonneuil, “L'historien et la planète. Penser les régimes de planéarité à la croisée des

While in the present period there is no pretense of maintaining prosperity “for all”, the arc of history called “civilized mission” in the nineteenth century was potentially for everybody – yes, including those to be forcefully civilized! To be sure, it is now seen as hypocritical, but from the point of view of my fanciful history of the distribution of ignorance and awareness – the only history the Moderns ever had –, it would be a mistake to confuse the two moments: denying what you know to be irreversible is not the same thing as betting on the inevitable advent of civilization.²³ The nuance that should not be missed is that it became hypocritical later, thanks to postcolonial studies, while the deep lack of authenticity of the present period is contemporaneous with the denial. No matter how much hype he generates, Elon Musk is not in continuity with Brunel or Edison. No matter how foreign it seems today, this planet – secularized Christian philosophy of history plus carbon – deserves the damning name “Civilization”.

If we move back even further in time, that is, when the so-called “great discoveries” were first inflicted on the “discovered”, it is even more difficult to introduce any distance between what for the actors was the unveiling of the world they lived in for good, and their hesitations to pursue its extension. Of course, this “glorious” history has been fully revised, but whatever historians do it seems hard to insert the consciousness of a sin being committed by the perpetrators themselves – contrary to what has happened today. The only way is to impute to them, but only retrospectively, a level of doubt they did not harbor at all. The reason was that the “philosophy of history” was actually at the time a “theology of salvation” that made Christianity the only envelop inside which all events could be understood.²⁴ No matter how many crimes were committed, they could be pardoned because there was one only mission: deliver the world to God and the geographical planet to knowledge – the two being fully conflated. Even Las Cases did not imagine straying away from that Mission, nor Montaigne to interrupt the treasure trove of discoveries. We now realize that it was also a planet among several to come and not yet the Planetary, but for those who were engaged in exploration, mapping and surveying, it was what the world was really like, finally. And this is the point: it had a finality that no later effort to doubt the Call could break.

Actually, without the great divergence happening much later, in the nineteenth century, even the period of “great discoveries” would look

écologies-monde, des réflexivités environnementales et des géopouvoirs”, Frank Adloff and Sighard Neckel (eds), *Gesellschaftstheorie im Anthropozän* (Frankfurt: Campus Verlag, forthcoming).

²³ See the marvelous chapter on William Jevons in Charbonnier, *Abondance et liberté*, 142–51.

²⁴ According to the traditional reading offered by Karl Löwith, *The Meaning of History* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1949).

retrospectively as an almost “innocent” moment among the events of world history and certainly not as the arc of world history – a late nineteenth century invention anyway.²⁵ Which is the main result of “connected history”, as I read it: every people was discovering every other people on its own terms; we no longer have to believe that those world makers were so important as to define the philosophy of history of the time.²⁶ The inventors of the Globe would look just like they did at the time at least for the majority of their contemporaries: great dreamers but not, not yet, as so many criminals.²⁷ Let’s face it, none of those who are now revising the history of Moderns would have had any qualms about “discovering” at last the real shape of the world. It was later that it was “covered up” again. No discernable superinfection here, just a deep sense of overwhelming authenticity. Hence the name of that planet: “Mundus”;²⁸ that is, the short episode when the Moderns were not strong enough to inflict on the planet they were surveying and happily pilfering the metamorphosis that “carbonization” would later entail and when their Faith in God provided their horizon with the shape of a totalizing Sphere mixing Mercator cartography with Christ holding the *orbis terrarum*.²⁹

By the way, the principle I am following here of detecting the distance between ignorance and awareness defines, negatively at least, another planetary body. It is the one always implied in any philosophy of history, that is, “the land of old”, the really autochthonous, ancestral or primordial Earth. The one Husserl said “does not move”.³⁰ Naturally, it is a myth for philosophers as well as for anthropologists, but it’s precisely also the land that only myths may seize upon. The point being that, for this planet, it is not the authenticity, primitiveness, harmony or beauty that count – all the clichés the other planets have thrown onto it. Rather, what defines it is the very impossibility of introducing any distance between where the people are and where they should be: they stand where they are. As we will see, through a recent new turn of history, it is also the planet that, after having been shed further and further in the archaic past, looks more and more like our

²⁵ Sanjay Subrahmanyam, *From Tagus to the Ganges: Explorations in Connected History* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2012). For a recent example, see the marvelous Indonesian case studied in Romain Bertrand, *L’histoire à part égale. Histoire d’une rencontre* (Paris: Seuil, 2011).

²⁶ Romain Bertrand (ed.), *L’exploration du monde. Une autre histoire des grandes découvertes* (Paris: Seuil 2019).

²⁷ Ayesha Ramachandran, *The Worldmakers: Global Imagining in Early Modern Europe* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2015).

²⁸ The term is just quaint enough to break the spurious continuity with what happened next and that should not aligned too readily with the later European hegemony.

²⁹ See Peter Sloterdijk, *Globes: Spheres, Volume II: Macrospherology*, transl. Wieland Hoban (Los Angeles: Semiotext(e), 2014).

³⁰ Edmund Husserl, *La Terre ne se meut pas*, transl. Didier Frank, Jean-François Lavigne and Dominique Pradelle (Paris: Minuit, 1989).

contemporaries. Hence its name, “Contemporaneity”, the one not affected by any philosophy of history. Think of that: people free from the attraction of any Omega Point!

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Each of the three moments, Mundus, Civilization and Exit, requires the calibration of an increasing gap between where people reside and where they are moving, what they believe they do and what they actually do. It is this disjunction that justifies the idea that they are driven by a philosophy of history. The pattern having been provided, as everybody knows, by the Biblical account of the Promised Land and of the movement forward it has generated. But to understand what went so deeply wrong in the twentieth century, we have to grasp why the very idea of *moving toward* some Promised Land actually destroyed systematically all attempts at orientation. It seems that everything happened as if the orientation in *time* was so powerful, that it broke down any chance of finding one’s way in *space*. It is this deep shift from a destiny based on history to an exploration of what, for want of the better term, could be called geography (actually *Gaiagraphy*), that explains the rather obsolete character of any philosophy of history. Historicity has been absorbed by *spatiality*; as if philosophy of history had been subsumed by a strange form of spatial philosophy – accompanied by an even stranger form of geopolitics (actually *Gaiapolitics*).

The reason for such a shift is that, as Chakrabarty has so clearly discerned, the figure of the Globe turned out to let that of the Planetary emerge. Globe in his view, and rightly so, is the name of another planet, not to be confused with any of its predecessors. It is like Civilization but on steroids and eaten from the inside by the discovery, *exactly at the same time*, of its negative twin, Earth as a system.³¹ “Globalization” is what happened after the last war, when the availability of gas gave the impression that any limit to prosperity could actually be overcome, and when the hegemony of prosperity for all – with a strong North American color – could be seen as its Omega Point. This is what Bacevich calls “a sense that a dazzling future lay just ahead”. Tim Mitchell’s *Carbon Democracy* provides a good definition of the project with “the Economy” as the only horizon.³² Nothing was left of the multiplicity of perspective still maintained in planet Civilization. Curiously, Globalization (what I call

³¹ This is the by now familiar theme of the Great Acceleration discussed also with great effect in Chakrabarty’s response.

³² Timothy Mitchell, *Carbon Democracy: Political Power in the Age of Oil* (London and New York: Verso, 2011).

globalization-minus) was really heading toward “the end of history” when it reached this most famous date of 1989, “a stone that causes people to stumble and a rock that makes them fall” (1 Peter 2–8).

History might well have ended here, as Fukuyama had predicted, had it not been for the emergence of another planetary body, at first hidden and almost mixed with this one. Exactly at the same time, and very largely in the same circumstances, appeared the planet that reinstated, one by one, the limits Globalization was imagining to escape from, giving a new twist to what history meant.³³ No matter if you call it Earth System Science or Gaia, the point is that, contrary to all the other planets before, inside this one the Earth has become an *agent* and no longer the backdrop of human agency. More precisely, Earth’s agency is not that of an indifferent power acting haphazardly as it had always done, but that of a *counter-power* counteracting specifically human action. In addition, this agent was reacting to human action at an incredible speed – what was registered first as the public issue of “global warming”, and then later as the geological period “Anthropocene”. It is especially revealing of this ambiguous fusion of the two planets that James Lovelock’s discovery of Gaia took place in Pasadena, during the heyday of space adventure in the golden 60s.³⁴ This is when the great break happened: the same period gave us Globalization – finally no longer any limit – and the totally incompatible realization that limits were everywhere and had to be taken into account very quickly.³⁵ Rather than Planetary, I prefer to call this body Anthropocene to stress that it is understood as the strict counterpart of Globalization. In some amazing feat of dialectics, Globalization begets Anthropocene as surely as CO₂ affects the Earth’s temperature.

But then the two celestial bodies split and what happened outside of their dual existence defines, for better or worse, what the twenty-first century inherits from the long and continuous distraction of the twentieth. The situation might be tragic, but it is immensely clarified by the opposite directions taken by planet Exit on one side and what I call the Terrestrial on the other (see diagram in Figure 3.).

³³ It is amusing to notice that at no moment in his argument does Bacevich see the connection between the notion of infinite freedom he finds so deleterious in post-Cold War America, and the absence of territorial engagement of people in this period. It is not only a case of extreme anthropocentrism but of psychocentrism: humans have no need for a cosmos, just feelings.

³⁴ So well-rehearsed in the study of the Whole Earth Catalogue by Dietrich Diederichsen and Anselm Franke (eds), *The Whole Earth Catalog: California and the Disappearance of the Outside* (Berlin: Haus der Kulturen der Welt, 2013).

³⁵ Sébastien Dutreuil, *Gaïa: hypothèse, programme de recherche pour le système terre, ou philosophie de la nature?* (thèse de doctorat, Université de Paris I, 2016).

On planet Exit, people conclude from the intrusion of the Earth into politics that the only way is to abandon any previous illusions regarding universality, the common good, development and prosperity for all. The take off and the cornucopia will continue, but only for those able to escape and ensconce themselves in some sort of gated communities or ever more isolated nation-states. The Modernist dream of previous philosophies of history might still be retained but in a drastically simplified version – for the extravagantly rich minority. And naturally, the reaction is perfectly predictable and just as certain as the effect of CO₂ on the increase of temperature: the invention of the planet “Security” for the many left behind and without any hope to profit from the cornucopia.³⁶

“Populism”, now the name for political philosophy everywhere, is the claim for a soil, a land, a protection, by those to whom such a ground is refused. Left behind, stranded in mid-air, without any access to a materially realistic piece of land, they only have identity to cling to. But identity is not a land, as the sad story of the Brexit is here to show; it is just the imagining of a land, the last remnant of the utopia of Modernity, what happens to the desire to move forward to the Promised Land when there is no land to be had. In spite of Prime Minister Boris Johnson’s conceit, “Global Britain” has very little connection with the British Empire of planet Civilization. As Carl Schmitt warned his interlocutors in his witty *Dialog on New Space*: “An historical truth is true only once”.³⁷

On the other side, and in complete reaction to those two planets Exit and Security, the decision is, on the contrary, to rematerialize, to reterritorialize, the question of what land, what ground lies under our feet. It is certainly the case that planet Anthropocene raises the question of Earth as an agent reacting to human actions, but it does not provide any political existence either to the Earth or to humans.³⁸ On the Terrestrial, everything begins to be transformed, especially the idea of a movement that could continue indefinitely in time.³⁹ The reason is that the more of the long history of the Earth you bring in the description – and this is essentially what is the

³⁶ I have written a little fable around this “fictional planetarium”, in Latour and Weibel (eds), *Critical Zones*, also available on my site <http://www.bruno-latour.fr/node/782> (accessed 13 June 2020).

³⁷ Carl Schmitt, *Dialogues on Power and Space*, ed. Andreas Kalyva and Federico Finchelstein, transl. with an introduction Samuel Garrett Zeitlin (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2015). And my reading of it, Latour, “How to Remain Human in the Wrong Space?”

³⁸ This is the problem we raised under the name Gaia 2.0 in Timothy Lenton and Bruno Latour, “Gaia 2.0”, *Science* 361 (6407), 2018, 1066–68, and that I tackled extensively in Bruno Latour, *Facing Gaia: Eight Lectures on the New Climatic Regime*, transl. Catherine Porter (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2017).

³⁹ Latour and Weibel (eds), *Critical Zones*, see the long section on the Terrestrial.

effect of the Anthropocene – the less *telos* you are able to maintain within the narrative. Life forms don't obey any providence; nor are they strictly following "laws of nature". The more their entangled history becomes foregrounded, the less the old divide between necessity – for nature, and liberty – for humans, becomes sustainable.⁴⁰ Life forms have managed to engender *habitability* for other life forms. That's the most they can teach us. But that's also, to the horrified realization of Earthbounds, the most humans today may strive for.⁴¹ To maintain conditions of habitability for some sorts of associations of humans and non-humans has nothing to do with any form of historical drive. No call of history here, no agent of history to expect. Maintaining habitability? That's the best you can do, requiring a sudden attention to what is livable, feasible, sustainable. A *good enough planet*, not the Promised Land.⁴² That's what everyone on this planet suddenly dreams of.⁴³

And this is where the whole idea of a philosophy of history appears to vanish. In all the episodes I reviewed – Mundus, Civilization, Globalization, even Anthropocene – there was this idea of a *convergence* so that the horizon ended up in some sort of closure and unanimity, precisely what Teilhard had captured with his now inaccessible Omega Point. Philosophy of history and *telos* are conjoined: if not catholicity, at least universality; if not universality, at least hegemony. The idea of some sort of convergence, however, disappears entirely from the Terrestrial. The whole question is to *disperse as much as possible* so as to decipher, to detect, to ferret out all the chances to maintain, trigger, nurture as many different habitability conditions as possible after the long century of unification and destruction. This is what breaks down for good the very content of what Modernity means: if you are no longer converging on a single time but dispersing in as many spaces as available, then you can no longer play the trick of breaking the past from the future. And in the end, that has been the only real content of what Modernity ever meant; its only *mot d'ordre* has always been: "You cannot stay behind stuck in the past, you should

⁴⁰ Bruno Latour and Timothy Lenton, "Extending the Domain of Freedom, or Why Gaia Is So Hard to Understand", *Critical Inquiry* 45 (3), 2019, 1–22. To be sure, Gaia is goal-oriented but not in any sense reminiscent of the *telos* proposed by philosophies of history.

⁴¹ In the book *Facing Gaia*, I dramatize the distinction between modern humans in or out of "nature" and Earthbounds in the Anthropocene.

⁴² None of his readers will be surprised to know that it's Viveiros de Castro who added the perfect punch line: "I resorted to the Winnicottian concept of the 'good enough mother' to define what an ethnographic description should be. Now I see we may apply it to a 'good enough Mother Earth' (personal communication to Bruno Latour).

⁴³ When I attended a panel with Anna Tsing about her book (*The Mushroom at the End of the World: On the Possibility of Life in Capitalist Ruins* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2015)), someone asked her: "what is the new agent of history that will come after the Proletariat" to which she answered in her subdued and ironic tone: "Don't you think we had enough of them already?" ...

move forward to the future". But what if this sort of orientation meant that you destroyed your ground and shifted the future into a utopia, a land of nowhere? Then the *mot d'ordre* carries no weight. The one who utters it looks much more ridiculous that the poor blokes he was throwing into the pit of the past.

One of the advantages of shifting to space is that all of those “planetary bodies” I have pinpointed are no longer organized historically: they all *act simultaneously* without any one of them able to disable and subsume the others. It is the bane but also the crucial importance of the present situation: we are divided, we are at war, but all of those ontologies of the land are at work *at the same time*. Plurality is inescapable. Which explains the general feeling of disorientation for those who had felt the pull and push of Modernity over at least four centuries. The most amazing switch of all is that those who had for so long been stranded on the primordial planet are now sitting where the Terrestrial seems to move: if Modernity is no longer the driver, then Contemporaneity becomes the main attractor. Time to revise *La pensée sauvage*, once again.

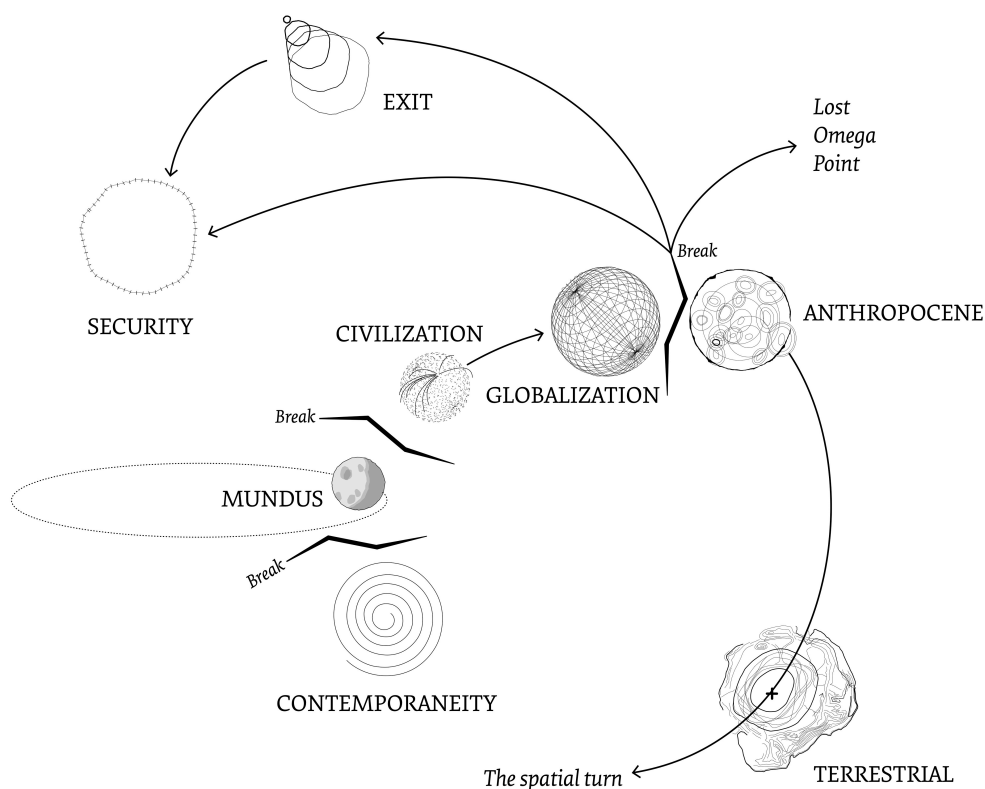


Figure 3. Drawn by Alexandra Arènes. This is a revised version of the diagram in Bruno Latour and Peter Weibel (eds), *Critical Zones: The Science and Politics of Landing on Earth* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2020). The spatial distribution of the “planets” is important, it seems that Terrestrial moves back to the attractor where Contemporaneity always resides. Exit and Security, on the other hand, are veering away both from the old arc of history – toward the inaccessible Omega Point – and from the new spatial turn. The point is of course that all planets attract one another and thus their joint and contradictory tides are felt on every point. We are all divided internally and externally by this new form of horoscope!

Emancipatory histories, a troubled but living legacy – response to Latour Dipesh Chakrabarty

Latour's comments remind me of a stimulating and widely read essay by the reputed Harvard historian Charles S. Maier, "Consigning the Twentieth Century to History: Alternative Narratives for the Modern Era", published in the *American Historical Review* in 2000. It is an erudite and thoughtful article, trying to sum up and assess some of the key structural changes, moral questions, and some other issues that the twentieth century, at the point of its passing, had thrown up for historians. Maier ponders some of the moral questions that the century posed to the West, reminding his readers of the "dark historical passage" of the world wars and genocides and of Isaiah Berlin's remark that this was "the worst century that ha[d] ever been". He observes with a refined sense of nuance and irony how "modernity" would have had different meanings for the likes of Adorno and Horkheimer and, say, the leaders of the postcolonial nations of Asia and Africa.⁴⁴ There were also political and philosophical questions of history that shaped Maier's essay, in particular his concern with futures of democracies and the twin-threats of populism and authoritarian rule, concerns that very much resonate even twenty years after they were expressed.

But missing from the otherwise large field of view of the lens through which Maier surveyed the twentieth century was any sign of what may be now regarded as the biggest problem of the late twentieth century, cutting across the East-West divide: anthropogenic climate change and the onset, according to Earth System Science scholars, of the Anthropocene. One of the deepest unintended ironies, in retrospect, of Maier's essay may have been its discussion of the themes of "delay and acceleration" in modern history. Maier disagrees with Koselleck on this theme: "Our modern concept of history," Koselleck wrote, "has initially proved itself for the specifically historical determinants of progress and regress, acceleration and delay." Maier demurs: "But acceleration is not a sufficient condition for ascribing some epochal quality to the century."⁴⁵ But the rhetoric of this statement must sound strange today, when, barely a couple of decades into the twenty-first century, we have more or less accepted the point that the second half of the previous century was

⁴⁴ Charles S. Maier, "Consigning the Twentieth Century to History: Alternative Narratives for the Modern Era", *American Historical Review* 105 (3), 2000, 812.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 811. Emphasis added. The Koselleck quote may be found in Reinhart Koselleck, *Futures Past: On the Semantics of Historical Time*, transl. Keith Tribe (New York: Columbia University Press, 2004; first published in German, 1979), 103.

mainly about the “Great Acceleration” of economy, consumption, and the emission of greenhouse gases throughout the world. And not only that. With the “Great Acceleration” came an epoch – the smallest unit in terms of geological periods and yet humungous in terms of human time – the epoch of the Anthropocene.

There was indeed an epochal quality to the second half of the twentieth century, a very large epoch in fact, one that might even see our civilization out. How could a historian as gifted and knowledgeable as Maier miss it? Not only Maier. Take those two wonderful books by the late Giovanni Arrighi, *The Long Twentieth Century* and *Adam Smith in Beijing*.⁴⁶ One will search in vain for any mention of anthropogenic climate change in these books, though Arrighi observes, with some pleasure, that “[a]t the turn of the twenty-first century, the ‘E’ and ‘I’ words, empire and imperialism, came back into fashion.”⁴⁷ His reference was to Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri’s *Empire* (2000) that, while taking postcolonial criticism to task, had everything to say about globalization but nothing, absolutely nothing, on global warming.

Why? That is Latour’s opening question, translated in my text into instances of the kinds of occupational hazards historians face in contemplating their own times. What makes historians studying the present miss some very large aspects of it? How could Maier, Arrighi, and Hardt and Negri, all astute readers of the histories they see themselves living through, miss a phenomenon as large as anthropogenic changes to the climate of the planet taken as a whole? Are our presently operative philosophies of history the most hazardous inheritance from the end of nineteenth century? Yet Christopher A. Bayly in his posthumously published *Remaking the Modern World 1900–2015*, has indeed a word or two to say about “the Anthropocene”.⁴⁸ So why does climate change come to Bayly’s attention while escaping the otherwise searching gazes of Maier or Arrighi? There is, it seems to me, a problem of “regimes of historicity” here (to think with François Hartog) in addition to whatever blindness specific philosophies of history may have created.⁴⁹ It appears that when it comes to modern historians’ sense of their own times, it is the news media – and not their philosophies of history – that write their meta-histories for them and help create the various regimes of

⁴⁶ Giovanni Arrighi, *The Long Twentieth Century: Money, Power, and the Origins of Our Time* (London: Verso, [1994] 2006) and his *Adam Smith in China: Lineages of the Twenty-first Century* (London: Verso, 2007).

⁴⁷ Arrighi, *Adam Smith*, 175.

⁴⁸ C. A. Bayly, *Remaking the Modern World 1900–2015: Global Connections and Comparisons* (Hoboken, N.J.: Wiley Blackwell, 2018), 287.

⁴⁹ François Hartog, *Regimes of Historicity: Presentism and Experiences of Time*, transl. Saskia Brown (New York: Columbia University Press, 2015).

historicity within which historians take up their individual projects. One likely problem that Maier, Hardt and Negri, and Arrighi faced writing in or around the year 2000 was that – even though the IPCC had been reporting on global warming since its establishment in 1988 – climate change was not “big news” until the Fourth Assessment Report of the IPCC that came out in 2007. By the time of Bayly’s sad demise in 2016, however, planetary climate issues had become so much a piece of global news that a historian interested in making sense of his or her own present simply could not ignore them.

In the rest of my discussion, I will take up Latour’s probing and provocative questions about philosophies of history and then connect the discussion back to his ideas about various regimes of planetarity.⁵⁰ I will argue that the culprit in historians’ misreading of the twentieth century – apart from the news media – are indeed some ideas about history that humanist historians inherited from early in the twentieth century, though the roots of these ideas go back into the nineteenth. In the process, I will suggest some friendly amendments to what Latour proposes.

Latour begins with three fascinating questions: what kind of a civilization develops something that it self-consciously recognizes as a philosophy of history? Secondly, why were such philosophies as have been developed so far not able to have a self-critical eye on themselves? And, finally, did this particular lack of self-reflexivity arise from the nature of the very activity of philosophizing history – that is, the act of turning empirical events of the past into raw material for a consistent set of philosophical propositions about near and distant human futures? He then makes some brilliant and thoughtful moves, developing his ideas regarding a series of planetary regimes that follow one another chronologically but also act as simultaneous and overlapping influences on our present. Much of the ground my own thoughts move on is shared with Latour, and I will try to argue (a) that what Latour calls Contemporaneity – a state of existence in which the past is not significantly different from the present and history itself is not seen as a driver – is indeed what was inhabited by most students of history who contemplated the past before the onset of the European Enlightenment; (b) that it is really since the nineteenth century that we have lived with the illusion that only some – the moderns – were contemporaries while others inhabited remnants of the past and that history was a process of bringing salvation to the latter; and (c) that our understanding of the predicament of

⁵⁰ Both Latour and I are indebted to Christoph Bonneuil for the phrase “regimes of planetarity” that Bonneuil developed as a riff on Hartog’s felicitous phrase “regimes of historicity.” See Christophe Bonneuil, “L’historien et la planète.” I am grateful to Bonneuil for sharing with me a copy of his essay.

Contemporaneity today, however, is seriously incomplete without dealing with the more populous parts of the planet – China and India in particular – and their shared legacy of what may be called postcolonial or developmental concerns that often constitute the staple of postcolonial studies.

Let me address Latour's first question while taking a step or two towards addressing the other two. For now I want to clarify that what we call philosophy of history – when history itself is understood in a modern sense as a general phenomenon, not history-of-this or history-of-that, as Koselleck pointed out a while ago – is a “late modern” phenomenon, it primarily belongs to the nineteenth century with its life extending into the twentieth.⁵¹ This is different from what we might regard, in retrospect, as the act of philosophizing history during the Enlightenment or before. When Machiavelli read Livy, for instance, he put Livy to the same use as ancients would have made of historical accounts: read history to learn lessons for individual or collective-political life. One might say, following Latour, that this was a performance of Contemporaneity as the ancients were not supposed to have inherited a world inherently different from that available in the present. Thus, to give an example taken at random from Machiavelli's text, he writes:

I am reading this History of Titus Livius with a view to profit[ing] by it, I think that all the methods of conduct followed by the Roman people and senate merit attention. And among other things fit to be considered, it should be noted, with how ample an authority they sent forth their consuls, their dictators, and the other captains of their armies, all of whom we find clothed with the fullest powers. ... This matter I have dwelt upon because I observe that our modern republics, such as the Venetian and the Florentine, view it in a different light ... [which has] brought Italy to her present condition.⁵²

Even when Gibbon published (in 1776) the first volume of his *The Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire* and described Tacitus as “the first of historians who applied the science of philosophy to the study of facts”, he did not mean it anything like what Kant or Hegel or Marx would later teach us to think of as philosophy of history.⁵³ Tacitus was not, in Gibbon's account or otherwise, someone who was out to divine the grand telos of human history – whether in

⁵¹ Koselleck, *Futures Past*, 194–95.

⁵² Niccolò Machiavelli, *Discourses on Livy*, transl. Ninan Hill Thomson (New York: Dover, [1883] 2007), 245–46. On all this, see also Koselleck, “Historia Magistra Vitae: The Dissolution of the Topos into the Perspective of a Modernized Historical Process,” in his *Futures Past*, 26–42.

⁵³ Edward Gibbon, *The Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire*, vol. 1 (New York: The Modern Library, n.d.), 186.

terms of class struggle or the cunning of reason. He was rather someone whose *Germania* allowed Gibbon to think of larger generalizations, such as the impact of climate on national histories or of the distinction between the civilized and the savage. Thus, Gibbon writes: “The Germans, in the age of Tacitus, were unacquainted with the use of letters; and the use of letters is the principal circumstance that distinguishes a civilized people from a herd of savages incapable of knowledge or reflection.”⁵⁴ This is an example of what Gibbon called “contemplating” – as distinct from simply describing – history, and it helped him in his battles with the antiquarians of his time, battles that, as Momigliano noted some time ago, were important for the emergence of the modern discipline of history.⁵⁵

Gibbon was writing Enlightenment history, and the word “philosophy,” when applied to history in this period, acquired a particular meaning, as J. G. A. Pocock showed with great erudition in his recent volumes entitled, *Barbarism and Religion*. Pocock recalls that “philosophy,” – “as the term was used towards the end of the seventeenth century, did not always indicate a body of systematic thought about nature and knowledge.”⁵⁶ It expressed a “civil attitude of mind, an openness to reason, a desire to control the passions of which fanaticism was one; but in this apparently eirenic sense [given the religious wars in Europe of the sixteenth, seventeenth, and early eighteenth centuries], it became the basis of a militant programme and ideology.”⁵⁷ This developed into an interest in social mores, morals, and the question of civilization in any society. Voltaire, to whom we owe the expression “philosophy of history” and who also wrote a book by that name, intended – says Pocock – this book to be a preface to his book, *Le Siècle de Louis XIV*.⁵⁸

So it is not what Voltaire designated “philosophy of history” that is at issue in this discussion. The philosophy of history in question – that is, the activity of reflecting on the process of human history as a whole, not discussions of the historian’s craft (though the two are connected) – is a family

⁵⁴ Gibbon, *The Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire*, vol. 1, 191. See also p. 198.

⁵⁵ See Gibbon, *The Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire*, vol. 1, 194–96 and 202 n. 71: “Tacit. Germ. c 3 ... there is little probability that the Greeks and the Germans were the same people. Much learned trifling might be spared if our antiquarians would condescend to reflect that similar manners will naturally be produced by similar situations.” Arnaldo Momigliano, “Ancient History and the Antiquarian”, *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes* 13 (3–4), 1950, 285–315.

⁵⁶ J. G. A. Pocock, *Barbarism and Religion: Narratives of Civil Government*, vol. 2 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 18.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*

⁵⁸ Pocock, *Barbarism*, vol. 2, 107. See also the discussion on Voltaire in Karl Löwith, *Meaning in History* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1949), 104–14 and R. G. Collingwood, *The Idea of History*, revised edition with Lectures 1926–1928, ed. with an Introduction by Jan van der Dussen (Oxford: Oxford University Press [1994] 2005), 76–78, 352.

of “progressive” ideas about human futures that dominated the world for about a hundred years in many different incarnations. We may find some of its roots going back to Hegel’s philosophy of history and his idea of the “cunning of reason” but it really comes into effect in the second half the nineteenth century in the idea of progress (Marxism and liberalism were two variants of it) and then appears in different shapes and sizes in the twentieth century under a variety of names such as “industrialization”, “modernization” (both socialist and not), “development”, and so on. I will take Karl Löwith’s *Meaning in History* (1949) and R. G. Collingwood’s *The Idea of History* (1946) as mid-twentieth century’s two representative texts on philosophy of history. They both recognize that the expression “philosophy of history” was coined by Voltaire. Löwith in addition sees in post-Enlightenment philosophies of history a certain secularization of Judeo-Christian ideals and arguments against the classical Greeks. This is, of course, a brutally summary way of describing the philosophies of history we see today as being in crisis.⁵⁹ Latour refers to this work of Löwith and it is of such philosophies that he asks: “What caused their blind spots?” The blindness related to precisely the regimes of planetarity that Latour lays out, the last in his chronological series being the idea of the Earth system or “the planet” – different from the globe, the world, and the earth – that I had proposed in an essay on the planet as a category of humanist thought.

In that essay, I had suggested that in the “age of the Great Acceleration”, the harder humans worked the earth and its biosphere in search of profit and their own material flourishing, the more they encountered what I called “the planet”, a dynamic entity that brought together long and short-term geological and biological processes to create not only an “Earth system” but also a “critical zone” that supported multi-cellular, complex life.⁶⁰ Latour and Lenton describe the critical zone as a thin pellicle on the surface of the planet within which most of life happens.⁶¹ It is by causing a crisis in the critical zone – that is, by breaching its boundaries – that humans encounter the planet. The planet has a relationship to the critical zone, I argued, but it was

⁵⁹ For a selection of texts of the twentieth century gathered together under the category “philosophy of history,” see Hans Meyerhoff (ed.), *The Philosophy of History of Our Time: An Anthology* (New York: Doubleday, 1959). Also, Karl Löwith, *From Hegel to Nietzsche: The Revolution in Nineteenth-Century Thought*, transl. David E. Green (New York: Columbia University Press, [1964] 1991).

⁶⁰ I capitalize “Earth” in the expression “Earth system” to signify the abstract and non-visualizable nature of the “Earth” that is being imagined as a system in that expression. I reserve the lower-case “earth” for what is seeable about the planet we live on. It is conventional, however, to capitalize the initials involved in the expression, Earth System Science (ESS).

⁶¹ Latour and Lenton, “Extending the Domain of Freedom”.

fundamentally indifferent to humans even though human life depended on processes that defined the “Earth system”. There could not be even a pretense of a “communicative” relationship between the planet and the human, nothing, for instance, like the way in which Heidegger imagined humans to relate to “earth”.

What made the moderns – especially nineteenth-century moderns and their descendants – so blind to the planet then, asks Latour? Why could they not see, at least by the middle of the twentieth century, that they had already breached boundaries of the critical zone and encountered, at their own peril, the “Earth system” that was not designed with humans in view? Why did the moderns continue to imagine that they were living on a sphere that not only was meant for them but one that also, thanks to human-invented technology, was becoming – ever more intensely – the globe of the much-celebrated phenomenon of globalization? Latour goes on from here to propose and develop multiple ideas of planetarity: Civilization, Mundus, Exit (and the Anthropocene), and Contemporaneity (I am fusing here two of Latour’s images of planetarity: Contemporaneity and Terrestrials). I will return to this schema of planetarities in a moment but for now let me address the question of why our reigning philosophies of history were so blindsided by the Anthropocene (creating the planetarity of Exit). Why did the familiar and self-congratulatory exponential graph of economic growth suddenly spell disaster: the most unwelcome advent of the Anthropocene?

Here we broach a problem that bears a distinct relationship to Latour’s propositions in his classic *We Have Never Been Modern*: the nature/society separation. The separation of the social sciences from the natural ones that took formal, disciplinary forms towards the nineteenth century has already been noted by Jean-Baptiste Fressoz and Fabian Locher.⁶² This, of course, profoundly affected dominant philosophies of history in the twentieth century. Consider Croce, someone who may be regarded as the patron saint of postcolonial history-writing since it was his idea that all history was contemporary history that became, simplified and made into a formula by E. H. Carr, a rallying-cry for much postcolonial thinking about the past in late twentieth century (such as in the much-mouthed slogan of the 1970s and 80s, “my experience is my history”).⁶³ The argument that all history was contemporary history could be made only if one assumed that history was an

⁶² Fabien Locher and Jean-Baptiste Fressoz, “Modernity’s Frail Climate: A Climate History of Environmental Reflexivity”, *Critical Inquiry* 38 (3), 2012, 579–98.

⁶³ Benedetto Croce, “History and Chronicle”, in his *History: Its Theory and Practice*, transl. Douglas Ainslee (New York: Russell and Russell, 1960 [first published in German in 1915]), 11–26. See the discussion in E. H. Carr, *What is History?* (Harmondsworth: Penguin [1961] 1970), 21. Carr bases his discussion on Croce’s *History as the Story of Liberty*.

exclusively human enterprise, bound by the very limited sense of time that humans work with, and that nature could never have history in the same sense as humans did.⁶⁴

This separation of the history of nonhumans from the history of humans is easy to locate in an early form in several of Croce's comments. In an essay titled "The 'History of Nature' and History" Croce argued that 'history of nature' was "so only in name". For natural history was mainly an exercise in classification: "The saying that nature has no history is to be understood in the sense that nature as rational being capable of thought has no history, because it is not – or, let us say, it is nothing that is real."⁶⁵ Croce acknowledged that "even ...in human history", there existed a "natural history", but one could not convert it back into history. "Do you wish to understand the true history of a Ligurian or Sicilian neolithic man?," he asked. His answer: "... if it not be possible, or you do not care to do this, content yourself with describing and classifying and arranging in a series the skulls, the utensils, and the inscriptions belonging to those neolithic peoples." For him, this was like wanting to understand the history of "a blade of grass". "First and foremost," he prescribed, "try to make yourself into a blade of grass, and if you do not succeed, content yourself with analysing the parts and even disposing them in a kind of imaginative history." This is why, he repeated, history was "contemporary" and a chronicle (something nature could be granted) "past history".⁶⁶ But this sense of contemporaneity, we should note, is very different from what Latour intends by the term, for it is predicated on a human/nonhuman distinction while Latour speaks of the contemporaneity of the Terrestrials, and his Terrestrials are never exclusively human.

From this particular essay of Croce's and another published later, we come to know that the distinction between natural and human history was triggered for Croce by the remarks that an economist, Friedrich von Gottl-Ottilienfeld, made in 1903 at the Seventh Congress of German historians held in Heidelberg. Gottl-Ottilienfeld's lectures, directed against historian Karl

⁶⁴ Admittedly, Braudel breaks the mold here but it is also clear that by "philosophy of history" he meant the "interpretation" that of necessity accompanied all narrative histories, and in his use of the word "civilization" he was closer to Burckhardt's use of that word in the nineteenth century than to twentieth-century debates on the topic. See Fernand Braudel, *On History*, transl. Sarah Matthews (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1980), 4: "...I maintain, despite Ranke or Karl Brandi, that narrative history is not an objective method, still less the supreme objective method, but is itself a philosophy of history"; and p. 11: "In fact, ... narrative history consists in an interpretation, an authentic philosophy of history." For a recent and innovative attempt to write history challenging the nature/society opposition, see Timothy LcCain, *The Matter of History: How Things Create the Past* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2017).

⁶⁵ Croce, "The 'History of Nature' and History", in his *History*, 128, 133

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, 134–35. Emphasis original.

Lamprecht, were later published under the title, *Die Grenzen der Geschichte* in 1904.⁶⁷ He “energetically denied the community and even the affinity of the historian with the geologist, of whom the [former] has as his object events (*das Geschehen*) and the latter stratifications (*die Schichtung*)” and this difference called for “the emancipation of historical thought from the naturalistic”.⁶⁸

Thus the *emphasis* on this separation of natural from human history – as distinct from its roots – goes back to the beginnings of the twentieth century and remained strong when the Oxford philosopher Robin Collingwood, a translator and disciple of Croce, wrote his lectures and notes that were posthumously published in 1946 as *The Idea of History*. Collingwood and his English scene give us some further insights into the history of the opposition between the partisans of this particular philosophy of history and those who saw human history as embedded in natural history. A few years after Collingwood’s death, the biologist J. B. S. Haldane published a book of essays in 1951 called *Everything Has a History*. He wanted to call the book *The History of England, and Other Essays* and then changed his mind: “A history of England generally turns out to be a few of the better known people in England in each century of the last two thousand years. I think it should mean the history of our Land, and should include what we know of the history of its people before any written records were made.”⁶⁹ Haldane’s first essay, “The Beginning”, started thus:

In this series of articles I intend to give a brief sketch of the history of England and Wales. By this I mean, not the history of the peoples who have lived in these countries, but of the lands themselves. Scots readers will doubtless complain that I have left Scotland out. There is a good reason for this. The rocks of northern Scotland are much older than most of those in England and Wales. And they have been much more violently disturbed, so that we do not know their history in anything like the detail with which we know those of England.⁷⁰

Haldane’s essays had been previously published in popular magazines such as the *Daily Worker*, the *Modern Quarterly*, the *Rationalist Annual*, *Coal*, and the *British Ally* – probably in the 1940s, so Collingwood, who was Haldane’s senior by a few years and who died in 1943, may or may not have seen some of them. But even if he had not, it can be said without a doubt that he would have

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, 128

⁶⁸ Croce, “Nature as History, Not as History Written by Us”, in his *History as the Story of Liberty* (New York: Meridian Books, 1955), 290.

⁶⁹ J. B. S. Haldane. *Everything Has a History* (London: George Allen and Unwin Limited, 1951), Preface.

⁷⁰ Haldane, *Everything*, 11

roundly objected to Haldane's use of the word "history" to describe changes in the natural world, and to the latter's very extravagant gesture of claiming, against all principles of Collingwood's philosophy, that everything, yes everything, had a history! For in his classic, *The Idea of History*, and in the more recent *The Principles of History, and Other Writings in Philosophy of History* – both volumes published posthumously – Collingwood had argued vehemently against just that sacrilegious idea.⁷¹

I have no evidence that Collingwood actually read these essays of Haldane's, but we can be sure that he had read and commented on Haldane's *The Philosophy of a Biologist*.⁷² Collingwood's immediate intellectual adversaries were "philosophers like M. Bergson, Mr. [S.] Alexander, and [A.N.] Whitehead," and in particular an essay published by Alexander in the 1930s under the title, "The Historicity of Things".⁷³ "The great and golden-mouthed philosopher, Samuel Alexander," remarked Collingwood, began "his last published essay," "The Historicity of Things" by saying "that in his opinion it was time the philosophers went to school with historians. The lesson he wished them to learn was, in brief, the all-importance of time, 'the timefulness of things.'" The natural world was historical in its construction, full of events, and if "history and natural science are in agreement, what ails philosophy that she should stand out of the happy party?"⁷⁴

Collingwood was not prepared to join this party. He was ready to grant that "modern astronomy ... gives us a celestial history", and that "that modern biology includes among its functions that of a biological history ... or ... that modern geology is among other things a geological history". He was also aware that "medicine is nowadays interesting itself in the history of disease[s] ... or that even physics itself is becoming historical in the mind of a thinker like Whitehead ...". But "none of these things", Collingwood insisted, "is history". "Chronology, yes; developments of the age-old idea that nature is essentially process or event, by all means; but history, no."⁷⁵ He explained further in *The Idea of History*: "... modern views of nature no doubt 'take time seriously'. But just as history is not the same thing as change, so it is not the same thing as

⁷¹ Collingwood, *The Idea of History*; R. G. Collingwood, *The Principles of History and Other Writings in Philosophy of History*, ed. and introduced by W. H. Dray and W. J. van der Dussen (Oxford: Oxford University Press, [1999] 2003).

⁷² See James Connelly, Peter Johnson and Stephen Leach (eds), *R. G. Collingwood: A Research Companion* (London: Bloomsbury Academic, [2009] 2015), 83, letter from Collingwood to Clarendon Press, dated 9 October 1934 (Ref: Clar 46, LB7274) containing comments on J. [B]. S. Haldane, *The Philosophy of a Biologist*. This leaves me wondering if Collingwood was a press reader for a manuscript of Haldane's.

⁷³ Collingwood, *The Idea of History*, 210–11

⁷⁴ Collingwood, *The Principles*, 56.

⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, 61.

‘timefulness’, whether that means evolution or an existence which takes time.” He was sure that if the question whether history “coincides in essentials with this modern conception of nature” were posed to “the ordinary historian”, the latter would “answer it in the negative”. For according to such a historian, said Collingwood, “all history properly so called is the history of human affairs”.⁷⁶ This did not mean, however, “that all human actions are subject-matter for history; and indeed historians are agreed that they are not.” Collingwood’s expanded on this point ran as follows: “... so far as man’s conduct is determined by what may be called his animal nature, his impulses and appetites, it is non-historical; the process of those activities is a natural process.” A historian, he said, “would not be interested in the fact that men eat and sleep and make love and thus satisfy their natural appetites.” But – and this was his point – “he [the historian] is interested in the social customs which they create by their thought as a framework within which these appetites find satisfaction in ways sanctioned by convention and morality.”⁷⁷

Because Collingwood mentions activities like sleeping, eating, and making love – activities in which humans engage in as individuals – it is clear that the word “men” in Collingwood’s sentence only meant an arithmetical sum of individuals (not a collectivity itself as a single entity, as in the expression “dominant species”, for example). From what we now know about human microbiomes (human coevolution with microbes) and their relationship to our moods and well-being, this mind-body distinction in the case of human individuals does not seem valid any longer.⁷⁸ But the deeper issue raised by Collingwood is that of the separation of human history from the history of the nonhuman, the separation that acted as the foundation of what both Löwith and Collingwood called “philosophy of history”. The untenable nature of this separation has become increasingly self-evident.

Haldane, Alexander, and Whitehead would thus appear to have won the argument in which Collingwood sought to engage them. This does not mean, however, that the concerns that animated philosophies of humanist history – varieties of emancipatory visions for humans – have ceased to exist. They exist, but only as indices of the predicament that humans have inhabited over the last several decades when, with alarming frequency, we have seen events

⁷⁶ Collingwood, *The Idea of History*, 212.

⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, 216.

⁷⁸ See, for example, C. E. Stamper et al., “The Microbiome of the Built Environment and Human Behavior: Implications for Emotional Health and Well-Being in Postmodern Western Societies”, *International Review of Neurobiology* 131, 2016, 289–323 for a study of how modern urbanization impacts the microbiomes and the physical and mental well-being of humans “due in part to decreased exposure to microorganisms that humans have coevolved with.”

in global human history doubling up as events in nonhuman (and sometimes geological) histories as well – and the latter on such a planetary scale that the two strands of human and the nonhuman histories seem inextricably linked.

Why then, Latour asks, did humans (in the West?) misinterpret their major “moral” victories in the twentieth century: in 1918, 1945, and 1989? His answer, presumably addressed to the West, is – too much “moral clarity”. The morally “good” side – the liberal democratic West thought so highly of their own moral triumph that they could not see where the world, environmentally speaking, was headed. An unanswerable charge, for it was indeed in 1988 that James Hansen told the US Congress about global warming. The IPCC was set up the same year. But here is where I also see a gap in the historical maps that Latour’s regimes of planetarity provide. The fall of the wall in 1989 happened in a world in which there was a major “new kid” on the block, and that was Deng Xiaoping’s economically resurgent China – a result, actually, of the deliberate deregulation and deindustrialization of the Anglo-American West that Latour discusses with so much effect in his *Down to Earth*.⁷⁹

“The principal reason,” writes Hannes Bergthaller in an essay on “Thoughts on Asia and the Anthropocene”, “why all the curves of the ‘Great Acceleration’ are still pointing relentlessly upwards (with the notable exception of that for population ...) is the spread of middle class consumption patterns around the world, if by middle class we understand people with a household income sufficient to purchase consumer durables (such as refrigerators, washing machines or motorcycles), to spend money on entertainment and on the occasional vacation.” As recently as 2000, he adds, “about 80% of this ‘global middle class’ was living in Europe and North America...” But by 2015, “their share had dropped to about 35%, due largely to the rapid expansion of the middle class in Asia.” Bergthaller reports that by 2030, “the Asian middle class” is expected to be “at least three times larger than that of the old ‘West,’” and to account “for two thirds of the world’s total ...” He goes on to quote a telling recent (2017) report from the Brookings Institution:

It was only around 1985 that the middle class reached 1 billion people, about 150 years after the start of the Industrial Revolution in Europe. It then took 21 years, until 2006, for the middle class to add a second billion; much of this reflects the extraordinary growth of China. The third billion was added to the global middle class in nine years. Today we are on pace to add another billion in seven years and a fifth billion in six more years, by 2028.⁸⁰

⁷⁹ Latour, *Down to Earth*.

⁸⁰ Hannes Bergthaller, “Thoughts on Asia and the Anthropocene”, in Gabriele Dürbeck and Phillip Hüpkens (eds), *The Anthropocenic Turn: The Interplay Between Disciplinary and Interdisciplinary Responses to a New Age* (London and New York: Routledge, 2020), 78. See also

This growth of the middle class – in China and India and elsewhere in the world – was and is predicated on a stated priority that, though not pursued everywhere with the same vigor, rhetorically continues to hold a very important place in all statements justifying unbridled economic growth. This was the question of elimination of mass poverty. Maria Hsia Chang, an American political scientist who has studied “the thought” of Deng Xiaoping, notes how Deng understood the “fundamental purpose” of Chinese communism to be “the elimination of poverty through the emancipation of the productive forces.”⁸¹ One could say the same of Nehru in India whose penchant for dam-building and power-irrigation came out of a desire to feed the “starving millions” who had been subject to frequent bouts of famine during the years of British colonial rule.⁸² Mass poverty itself was a product of modernity. Sanitation, public health strategies, medicines, the control of epidemics and pandemics – measures underwritten by access to cheap energy in the form of fossil fuel – allowed a greater percentage of the poor to survive. Mass poverty emerged as a problem of the first order in these new nations of the 1950s and ‘60s that economic growth, development, and modernization – each of these terms granting these new nations a sense of where their histories ought to be headed – were meant to tackle.

Aimé Césaire, for instance, visualized a project of Europeanization of the world *sans* European domination:

I maintain that colonialist Europe is dishonest in trying to justify its colonizing activity by the obvious material progress that has been achieved in certain fields under the colonial regime...[But] Europeanization [of Asia and Africa] was (as is proved by the example of Japan) is no way tied to ... European occupation [emphasis original]. ... The proof is that at present it is the indigenous peoples of Africa and Asia who are demanding schools, and colonialist Europe which refuses them; that it is the African who is asking for ports and roads, and colonialist Europe which is niggardly on this score; that it is the colonized man who wants to move forward, and the colonizer who holds things back.⁸³

Elizabeth Chatterjee, “The Asian Anthropocene: Electricity and Fossil Developmentalism,” *Journal of Asian Studies*, 79 (1), February 2020, 3-24.

⁸¹ Maria Hsia Chung, “The Thought of Deng Xiaoping,” *Communist and Post-Communist Studies* 29 (4), 1995, 380.

⁸² See the discussion in Chapter 4 of my book, *The Climate of History in a Planetary Age* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, forthcoming).

⁸³ Aimé Césaire, *Discourse on Colonialism*, transl. Joan Pinkham (New York: Monthly Review, 1972 [first published in French in 1955]), 24-5.

The Bandung conference of 1955 came out of this teleological view of the future, this new-found and highly unstable vision of a world undergoing more growth and development without any domination of one nation by another!⁸⁴ This was also an imagination of a different global-planetary regime, an imagination fueled by the claims that the colonized made on the European Enlightenment. Fanon perhaps was perhaps the most eloquent spokesperson for this imagination. “All the solutions to the major problems of humanity,” he wrote, “existed at one time or another in European thought. But Europeans did not act on the mission that was designated them. ... The Third World is today facing Europe as one colossal mass whose project must be to try and solve the problems ... Europe was incapable of finding the answers to.”⁸⁵ This was a new regime of planetarity of the anti-colonial, modernizing imagination, an imagination that acknowledged its debt to Europe in a full-throated manner and yet asserted its sovereign, anticolonial values. Humanocentric, yes, but resolutely anti-imperial. Latour does not mention this particular regime of planetarity.

The idea of “emancipation” has many roots, as would be true of its cognates – “freedom” and “liberty”, two similarly inspiring and global ideas in human history. Many of these roots go back at least to the nineteenth century when we hear of “emancipation of slaves”, and later in the century of “freedom” as conceived in the philosophical traditions of Marxism and liberalism. Jürgen Osterhammel characterizes the nineteenth century as being, among other things, “a century of *emancipation*”. But this was a time, he explains, when the word “emancipation”, “derived from Roman law and emphatically European, [was] far less likely to be applied to the world as a whole”.⁸⁶ What I intend to mean by “emancipation”, however, is closer to how Hannah Arendt interpreted the idea of “revolution” in one of her posthumously published lectures. In this lecture entitled, “The Freedom to be Free”, Arendt postulated, going back to the late-eighteenth and nineteenth-century revolutions, a fundamental relationship between freedom from fear and – in today’s terms – freedom from poverty: “to be free for freedom meant first of all to be free not only from fear but also from want”.⁸⁷ It was this dual-engine of a composite desire for freedom from having to fear “the white man”

⁸⁴ See my “Legacies of Bandung: Decolonization and the Politics of Culture”, *Economic and Political Weekly* 40 (46), 2005, 4812–18.

⁸⁵ Franz Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth*, transl. Richard Philcox (New York: Grove Press, 2004 [first published in French in 1963]), 237–38.

⁸⁶ Jürgen Osterhammel, *The Transformation of the World: A Global History of the Nineteenth Century*, transl. Patrick Camiller (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2014; first published in German, 2009), 916–17.

⁸⁷ Hannah Arendt, “The Freedom to be Free”, *New England Review* 38 (2), 2017, 63. I owe this reference to Nazmul Sultan.

and for freedom from hunger and poverty that drove the anticolonial and revolutionary movements in Asia and Africa in the mid-twentieth century.

Emancipation, in my sense, thus begins a new non-Western life in the 1950s and 60s. It begins life through various forms of internationalism but blends later in the century into Globalization but remains tinged with an earnestness that is still visible in the time of Deng Xiaoping in China and Manmohan Singh (India's Finance Minister when India liberalized her economy in 1991, later PM) in India. That earnestness transforms into authoritarianism and bad faith with later leadership but – and this is my point – a legacy of “obligation to the masses” remains central to the legitimization that both the Chinese and Indian regimes seek internally. And the rhetoric of the appeal “we need fossil fuel to move millions out of poverty” has a global force because of the pull Planet Emancipation is still capable of exerting on the conscience of the privileged (compare Bill Gates with Elon Musk as visionaries of the future).

Thus 1989 was not just about the significance of the fall of the Berlin Wall for Western democracies. One should not forget the Tiananmen Square protests of the same year. Nor was the story exclusively about the “moral clarity” of the West – the colonized and the Western critics of empires had always known how flawed and misleading (for the West itself) that clarity was, since it accompanied and justified every piece of colonial aggression. The late 1980s and the 1990s remain important, also, for what happened in the non-Western world and in postcolonial thinking. India opened up her economy from 1991. True, *We Have Never Been Modern* (WHNBM) came out soon after, in 1991, critiquing the “constitution of the modern”. But these were also the years when postcolonial criticism was reaching its crescendo as well – between Spivak's publication of “Can the Subaltern Speak?” in 1988 and the release of Homi Bhabha's *The Location of Culture* in 1994. Arjun Appadurai would publish *Modernity at Large: Cultural Dimensions of Globalization* in 1996. My *Provincializing Europe* came out in 2000.⁸⁸

Yet there was no conversation with Hansen, the IPCC (set up in 1988), or with WHNBM. Why? From where did this blind spot arise? For one thing, postcolonial thought – for all its critique of the nation-state and race-class formations – was also just as environmentally blind as anticolonial

⁸⁸ Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, “Can the Subaltern Speak?,” in Cary Nelson and Lawrence Grossberg eds., *Marxism and the Interpretation of Culture* (Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1988), 271-316; Homi K. Bhabha, *The Location of Culture* (London and New York: Routledge, 1994); Arjun Appadurai, *Modernity at Large: Cultural Dimensions of Globalization* (Minneapolis: The University of Minnesota Press, 1996); Dipesh Chakrabarty, *Provincializing Europe: Postcolonial Thought and Historical Difference* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2000).

nationalism. It took modernity and the modernization of the world for granted. WHNBM, on its part, did not connect with the postcolonial desire for growth, modernization, consumption and their democratization. At the same time as the air was becoming laden with more greenhouse gases and particulate matter, the size of the consuming classes in the world was growing, people were being pulled out of poverty in large numbers in places like China and, more importantly, descendants of the formerly colonized, the enslaved, and the underprivileged and the marginalized were joining the ranks of these newly propertied classes. Inside the West, the struggle was seen to be primarily against racism and for versions of multiculturalism (including Indigenous and minority peoples' rights), struggles that spoke to an emergent sense of democracy but, sadly, not to any idea of an enveloping planetary crisis of the environment. That awareness would not awaken till the crisis was deeper and more upon us. Even in my own thinking in the work I did in association with colleagues in *Subaltern Studies*, the onward march of human history – towards more rights, towards democracies to come – went straight past the world of nature until (speaking for myself) my train of postcolonial thought crashed into the planetarity of the 2010s.

I agree with Latour that the received philosophies of history are in crisis.⁸⁹ The Elon Musk vision that humans will set up colonies on other planets – something that Hannah Arendt once saw as a triumph of the human species, its capacity to overcome its earth-dependence – now belongs squarely to the planetary regime that Latour has called Exit. But the riding the planet Exit is not going to be easy; it will always fall under the gravitational pull of the planets Contemporaneity and Emancipation. Planet Exit would have worked if it had arrived somehow before the age of the masses and that of mass politics. But today all regimes – even populist and authoritarian ones – seek legitimacy either through improving the economic conditions of the masses or through appealing to their worst fears and prejudices or through a mixture of both. And the ongoing planetary environmental crises such as the current pandemic often affect both the rich and poor, albeit differentially. There is thus, in my imagined orrery, an inter-play between two of our planets, Contemporaneity-Terrestrial and Emancipation. Emancipation wants to draw the Terrestrial into itself – convert the politics of life into bio-politics – but cannot because the very logic of Emancipation gives rise, on the one hand, to a crisis of the biosphere (we can't all be modern!) and hence to the desire among the super-elite for Exit (including the some of the richest in India who

⁸⁹ For an earlier, perceptive statement about this crisis, see Zoltán Boldizsár Simon, "(The Impossibility of) Acting Upon a Story We Can Believe", *Rethinking History* 22 (1), 2018, 105–25.

would love to take a ride on Musk's spaceships); but Emancipation cannot become identical with Exit, on the other hand, because of the historically inherited obligation to the masses. That obligation is served today in bad faith but the force of that obligation remains and can be seen in populist and other measures of political management. The only change I see is that the "earnestness" that was once authentic in the time of Nehru in India and Deng in China is now mostly a matter of performance. But the performance is crucial both internal politics and global negotiations on fossil fuel use. So even if the performance is in bad faith it cannot be completely given up.

Let me then end this section with two propositions. First, the Exit planet will find it hard to escape the gravitational fields of Contemporaneity and Emancipation. Second, the ruination of exclusively humanocentered philosophies of history and the difficulties of developing cosmologies that bring all Terrestrials together into one, capacious philosophical tent may mean a tragic triumph of "band-aids" and "short-termism" in human history. Humans may have to continue down that tragic path until the tensions between the three regimes of planetarity that Latour has respectively christened Exit and Contemporaneity and the one that I called Emancipation play themselves out.

Coda: from emails exchanged by the authors

BL: If I understood you correctly, Emancipation is the name you give to a deoccidentalized and deamericanized destiny which continues in earnest to believe in what used to be the Globalization horizon but that the Globalization has abandoned when it broke down on the wall of the Anthropocene – your Planetary.

DC: I agree, the only change I see is that the "earnestness" which was once authentic in the time of Nehru in India and Deng in China is now mostly a matter of performance but the performance is crucial for both internal politics and international negotiations on questions of energy politics, agricultural subsidies, and other related matters. So even if Planet Emancipation exists in bad faith it cannot be abandoned. Some very powerful leaders of the present political dispensation in India, for instance, may very well want to give up all pretension of caring for the poor and hand over the economy to a fraction of the capitalist classes that fund them but they can't really execute that wish, never fully and never with gay abandon. They have to work under the burden of the legacy that anticolonial dreamers – indebted to Europe (as spelt out by Fanon) – left to the sons and daughters of the formerly colonized. This is the dead hand of the emancipatory philosophies of history that the anticolonial leaders of the Asia and Africa once embraced earnestly.

The demographic and economic and the aspirational power of Emancipation as it stands now creates a real gravitational field that works on those of Exit, Terrestrial, and the Contemporaneous.

BL: Okay, then I will propose to position your Emancipation where I see the argument going, so that the “gravitational pull” be visible.

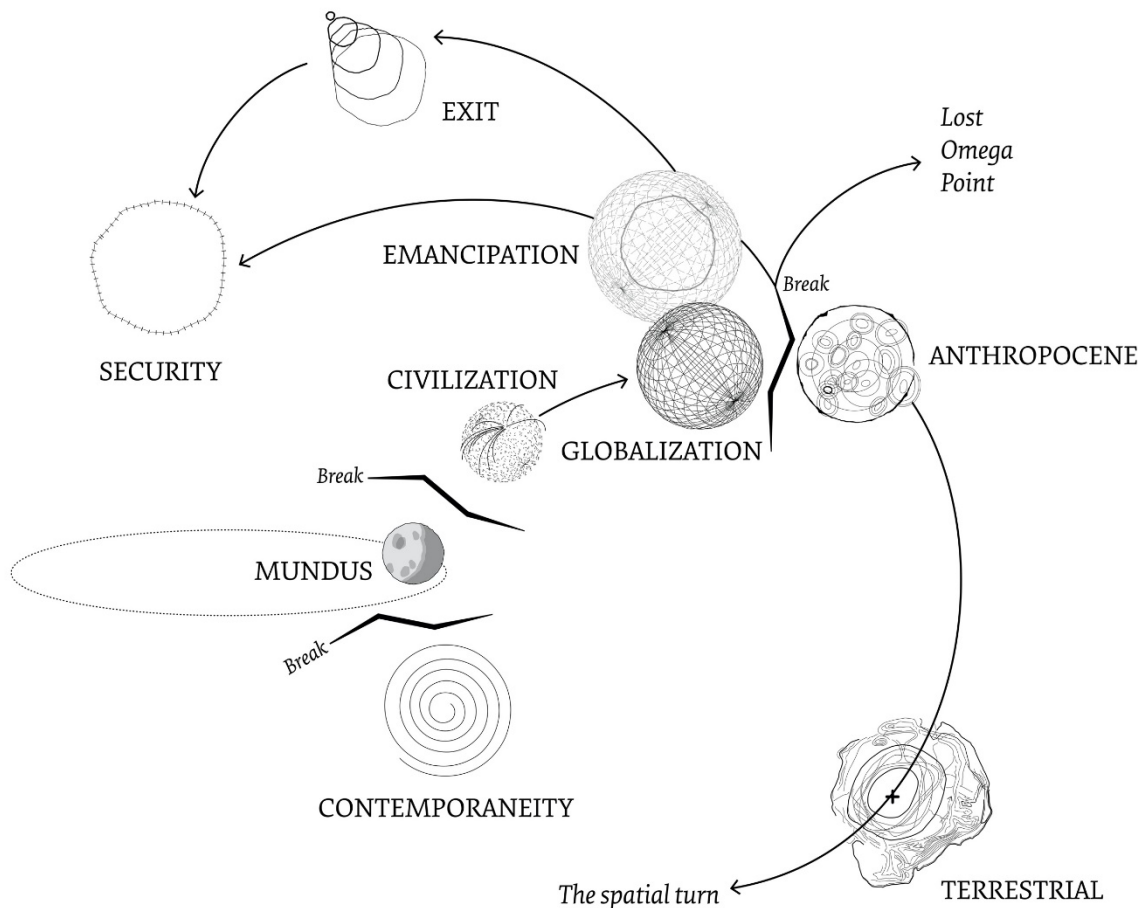


Figure 4. Drawn by Alexandra Arènes. This is a revised version of Figure 3 after the inclusion of the Emancipation planet invoked by Dipesh Chakrabarty.