



The 2023 Cambridge Graduate Conference in Political Thought

Political by Nature: Political Thought  
Through the Lens of the Anthropocene

Keynote speaker: Dipesh Chakrabarty

Magritte

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# Conference Programme

8.45 – 9.00 Registration

9.00 – 9.15 Opening Remarks

9.15 – 10.45 **Panel 1: Nature and Science, Domination and Freedom**

*Commentator:* Lauren Wilcox; *Chair:* Sam Harrison

- Joel Littler (University of Oxford):

*Understanding Nature and Nihilism in Late Nineteenth-Century Japan through the ‘Beggard-Philosopher of Naturalism’, Isaak Abraham*

- Phil Xing (London School of Economics):

*Crania Civilisation: Dilemmas, Social Physics and the Making of Racial Science*

- Jasmijn Leeuwenkamp (University of Amsterdam):

*From Natural Rights to Rights of Nature: A Critical Evaluation of the Notion of Property in Rights of Nature Theories*

10.45 – 11.00 Break

11.00 – 12.30 **Panel 2: Scarcity, Crisis, and Community**

*Commentator:* Sylvana Tomaselli; *Chair:* Carl Pierer

- Shreya Khaund (University of Oxford): *Migrant Experiences in Climate Crisis: Assam in the Mid-Twentieth Century*
- Koen Klein (University of Leiden): *Fighting to survive, losing against nature in Roman Egypt*
- Nicolae Biea (University of Chicago): *Return of the Repressed: Human and Natural Finitude in Mid-Twentieth-Century Social Thought*

12.30 – 13.30 Lunch break

13.30 – 15.00 **Panel 3: Nature as a Political Imaginary**

*Commentator:* Shruti Kapila; *Chair:* Nanna Sæten

- Alina Utrata (University of Cambridge): *“Cloud First, Land Last”: Silicon Valley and Its Natural Metaphors*
- Clare Francis (University of Cambridge): *The Tulip and the Eagle: Nature and modernity in the political thought of Muhammad Iqbal*
- Shriya Dasgupta (Pondicherry University) and Oyeshi Ganguly (Hertie School Berlin): *Jal, Jangal, Zameen: Locating the Adivasi Woman in Postcolonial Environmental Movements*

15.00 – 15.15 Break

15.15 – 16.45 **Panel 4: Revisiting Origins of Anthropocenic Thinking**

*Commentator:* Duncan Kelly; *Chair:* Michael Leger

- Tiancheng Yu (University of St. Andrews): *An Analogy Between Nature and the Sovereign State: Malebranche’s Positive Nature and Its Political Metaphor*
- Nayeli Riano (Georgetown University): *The ‘Barbarity’ of Nature: Revisiting the Civilization and Barbarism Debates in Latin American Thought*
- Florian Skelton (Goethe University Frankfurt): *Han Shan in the Anthropocene. On Gary Snyder’s Attempt to “Environmentalize” Eastern Spirituality*

16.45 – 17.00 Break

17.00 – 18.30 **Keynote Lecture:** *The Personal Is Not Only Political but Also Planetary*

Dipesh Chakrabarty, Lawrence A. Kimpton  
Distinguished Service Professor in History  
(University of Chicago)

18.30 – 19.00 Closing Remarks, followed by a Drinks Reception  
19.30 Conference Dinner at *Little Petra* (60 Hills Road,  
Cambridge CB2 1LA)

# Panel 1: Nature and Science, Domination and Freedom

*Commentator:* Lauren Wilcox; *Chair:* Sam Harrison

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Joel Littler (University of Oxford): *Understanding Nature and Nihilism in Late Nineteenth-Century Japan through the 'Beggar-Philosopher of Naturalism', Isaak Abraham*

**Abstract:** This paper interrogates the transnational linkages between nature and nihilism in Japan in the 1880s. On 6 June 1889, Isaak Abraham (1821-unknown) was served a deportation notice in Nagasaki, south-western Japan. He was accused of being a disciple of Mikhail Bakunin and was provided with passage to San Francisco to get him out of Japan. Abraham was born in Sweden and spent many years in America before arriving in Japan, where he became known firstly for his striking appearance — shoeless, ripped clothes, a long beard, and secondly for his espousal of 'naturalism' (shizenshugi). Naturalism included a distaste for government, laws, religion, morality, commerce, and culture. Instead, he proposed destroying society and replacing it with mutual-aid, communal marriage, and an agrarian life for all. His Japanese counterparts described his views as both naturalism and nihilism. In this paper, I uncover how 'nihilism' informed ways Japanese intellectuals and revolutionary activists like Miyazaki Tōten (1870-1922) articulated the role of 'nature' in society. By writing about Abraham's thought, I focus on how it was understood and rearticulated in Japan. Tōten in particular continued to develop nihilist concepts of freedom and autonomy to agitate for Asian revolutions. This work presents an intervention in the historiography of Japanese intellectual history, in which nonstate and transnational



intellectual interaction is usually sidelined in favour of state-centred civilizing discourse.

Phil Xing (London School of Economics): *Crania Civilisation: Dilemmas, Social Physics and the Making of Racial Science*

**Abstract:** Samuel Morton was renowned by his contemporaries as the “father of [American] anthropology”. His two works with some 800 cranial measurements, *Crania Americana* and *Crania Ægyptiaca*, became the subject of contestation across the globe throughout the 19<sup>th</sup> century. This article contextualises Samuel Morton’s cranial statistics as an attempt to rescue civilisational worldviews through the leading scientific and phrenologically inspired methods of *Physique Sociale*. To resolve the crisis of civilisational worldviews perpetrated by (1) the indigenous resistance to civilising missions in the settler colonies and (2) the African celebration of a hypothetical African origin of world civilisation, Morton applied the pioneering scientific methods of “the average man” proposed by the Belgium astronomer Adolphe Quételet to identify the immutable racial laws regulating civilisation. Deploying the state-of-the-art methods of *Physique Sociale*, he also gave scientific verification to phrenology against its various

opponents. The global and scientific visions of Morton's crania civilisation proved a lasting influence and continued to shape the contestation between racial scientists and African diaspora thinkers after the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century.

The revelation of the global contexts and receptions of Morton's racial science speaks to three sets of historiographies. First, it highlights the imperative of reading 19<sup>th</sup>-century racial scientists as an underexplored category of international thinkers equally engaged with the international politics of their time. Trained as a physician, Morton relied on anatomy to think through the problem of civilisation, with equally significant consequences. Second, it further globalises the historiography of racial science by showing how the global visions of Morton's crania civilisation shaped white anthropologists and circumscribed African diaspora resistance. Finally, it invites further reflection on the entanglement between early social sciences and the making of 19<sup>th</sup>-century racial science. Much as his global visions, Morton's choice to rely on the pioneering scientific methods of *Physique Sociale* not only grounded his own racial thought but also continued to inform patterns of

contestation between white racial scientists and African diaspora thinkers in the late 19th century.

Jasmijn Leeuwenkamp (University of Amsterdam): *Why should a river own itself? The (natural) right to property and colonial legacies in Rights of Nature*

**Abstract:** In recent years the idea to give rights to nature has gained traction within legal theory and philosophy, and in the wider public discourse. The theoretical debate over whether or not nature should be granted legal personhood began in the Western academic context with Christopher Stone's 1972 article 'Should Trees Have Standing?', in which he argued for granting legal personhood to nature. While the theoretical debate was rooted largely in the US context, it was indigenous communities in South America and New Zealand who first realized the juridico-political implications of such initiatives (Tanasescu 2016). The debate on the Rights of Nature (RoN) thus shows an interesting ambivalence: on the one hand, RoN are generally seen as the 'emancipation of nature' within the political/liberal rights domain, enabling their equal 'standing' vis-à-vis other legal persons (including institutions and corporations). On the other hand, RoN theories call into question the very ideas about modern science and liberal philosophy from which the rights tradition emerged. These theories contrast modern (Western) conceptions of nature that instrumentalize, objectify, and master nature, to indigenous systems of thought that emphasize human and non-human interconnectedness. This paper critically analyzes this tension between RoN's aim of liberal inclusion and emancipation (the river/forest/earth 'should own itself'), and its critique of liberalism's complicity with and justification of colonialism as a project of domination of 'nature', including indigenous and enslaved people, through the Lockean notion of 'property'. By

evaluating the different roles that the notions of ‘property’ and ‘ownership’ seem to play in RoN theories, and by revisiting the complex interconnections between property rights and the idea of human rights, I argue that the question of ownership poses difficult questions for RoN advocates who aim to uphold a non-anthropocentric perspective that is also ecofeminist and decolonial in its thrust and scope.

## Panel 2: Scarcity, Crisis, and Community

*Commentator:* Sylvana Tomaselli; *Chair:* Carl Pierer

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Shreya Khaund (University of Oxford): *Migrant Experiences in Climate Crisis: Assam in the Mid-Twentieth Century*

**Abstract:** This paper studies human responses to environmental disasters by examining the case of “flood jihad,” an exaggerated catchphrase widely circulated in mainstream media targeted at Muslim Bengali-speaking migrant communities in the wake of the 2022 Silchar floods in Assam, Northeast India. Assam and Bangladesh face common environmental challenges because of overlapping geographies. Historical patterns of mobility that are incompatible with the boundaries set up by modern nation-states are a result of shared water resources and abundant natural reserves. Nearly every year, communities in Northeast India and Bangladesh settled along the Ganga-Brahmaputra-Meghna (GBM) deltaic plains are affected by floods, frequent earthquakes and soil erosions. Shared geophysical impact, pre-colonial and colonial patterns of movement, and postcolonial developments have collectively influenced the migration of communities between the two nation-states. Bengali-Muslim migrants in Assam today, however, are one of the most persecuted communities in India as a result of an “immigration panic” against “illegal” Bangladeshi migrants. In the context of regular floods in the region, this paper will historically understand the communal tensions that rise from climate disasters, which are presumed to be ‘man-made’ catastrophes orchestrated by the socially and politically vulnerable migrant minority groups in Assam. By tracing the patterns of human mobility in the mid-twentieth century, this paper underscores the adaptive techniques used by migrant communities to cope with the challenges of climate change and systematic state disenfranchisement.



The approach of this paper, grounded and stimulated by perspectives in environmental history and ‘the Anthropocene,’ centres climate change as a determinant factor in the borderland regions of Northeast India, an attempt to understand part of the many challenges that come with movement across borders.

Koen Klein (University of Leiden): *Fighting to survive, losing against nature in Roman Egypt*

**Abstract:** The delicate and fragile upkeep of a stable supply of food in spite of bad harvests and crop failure is hard enough to maintain for any pre-modern city, but more so if there is not nearly enough natural arable land to sustain it. In my paper for the Cambridge Graduate Conference in Political Thought, I present the case of the village of Soknopaiou Nesos (Dimeh Es-Saba), a city which had far too little arable land to sustain itself naturally. To obtain enough food, Soknopaiou depended on a larger network of fishers and land leases in other villages. To make matters more complicated, the city functioned within the Roman Fayyum, an area already highly subsistent on the upkeep of irrigation channels for an otherwise difficult to cultivate land. This situation could hardly remain permanent: the city was deserted in the third century CE. It’s sudden decline was most likely a combination of both an outbreak of the plague as well as a losing battle against an encroaching desert, already weakened by strains on the supply chain. What is a disaster for Soknopaiou Nesos, however, is a treasure trove for the historian. Because the area of land was not naturally arable, this claimed land was continually fought over. Thanks to the very dry conditions of the Egyptian desert, Soknopaiou Nesos has a vast array of surviving document, some 1549 span the last two hundred years of its existence. My paper gives an insight into the dealing of this city, expanding on their economic dealings (the many accounts of wheats Trismegistos provides) as well as their religious and philosophical endeavors (the city was mostly made up of priests). My proposal for the Conference thus envelops these fields of lived experiences and with it, this paper aims to answer the question what

people strive for when trying to change the course of the natural landscape. All this in an area where the nature-culture balance was highly precarious.

Nicolae Biea (University of Chicago): *Return of the Repressed: Human and Natural Finitude in Mid-Twentieth-Century Social Thought*

**Abstract:** This paper draws a previously unremarked connection between two discourses which came to prominence during the same historical moment of the late-1960s and early-1970s: on the one hand, the increasing awareness, famously instantiated by 1972's Limits to Growth report, of the impossibility of reconciling continued exponential economic expansion with the planet's finite natural endowments; on the other hand, the renewed emphasis placed by the economics discipline, most notably by Chicago-school human capital theory, on scarcity as an inescapable condition of human action. Both discourses, I suggest, were born out of the crisis of the Keynesian governmentality which had become hegemonic in North America and Western Europe in the immediate postwar decades. The Keynesian promise of generalized affluence took the industrial production of infinitely reproducible goods as the paradigmatic case of economic activity, thereby eliding the dependence of economic growth both on the consumption of exhaustible resources and on the reproduction of human populations through household and service labor. The crisis of the postwar capitalist regime was, in consequence, accompanied by the politicization of ecological matters and of human reproduction. For the "limits to growth" discourse, the two issues were necessarily imbricated: the finitude of our natural environment emerged in relation to the runaway expansion of the human economy and population. Economics itself shifted registers during this period, abandoning the optimistic narratives of the Keynesian years and reasserting the universality and inevitability of economizing behavior. The extension, by scholars such as Gary Becker, of economic models to all aspects of life had at its precondition the equivalence between scarcity – the insufficiency of means to satisfy ends – and human action. Homo

economicus is recast as manager of his own finitude. Economics was thus transformed into a much more capacious apparatus, capable of absorbing both human nature and the natural environment as particular economic constraints. Complaints of the overextension of the economy undergo dialectical reversion as all of human life and the planetary ecology are incorporated into the economy as objects of rational management. The paper therefore argues for the importance of examining the ways in which the concepts employed in addressing our current ecological-economic conjuncture are mediated by past capitalist crises and the strategic responses they prompted.

# Panel 3: Nature as a Political Imaginary

*Commentator:* Shruti Kapila; *Chair:* Nanna Sæten

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Alina Utrata (University of Cambridge): “*Cloud First, Land Last*”:

*Silicon Valley and Its Natural Metaphors*

**Abstract:** In this paper, I will discuss how Silicon Valley elites have used metaphors of nature in order to justify and obscure the political rule of their technology corporations. In particular, I will show how descriptions of digital infrastructure as free, uncontrolled natural spaces obscures the ways in which they have established centrally-controlled extractive apparatuses which harm the environment. Finally, I will discuss how these paradigms have been motivated and informed by colonial understandings of nature. Scholarly literature on ‘the cloud’ has noted how the term has been deliberately deployed in order to invoke fuzzy images of an amorphous space with ambiguous control, located ‘somewhere up there’ in the sky (Hogan, 2018; Hu, 2015). This natural metaphor has deliberately obscured the ways in which ‘the cloud’ is really an enormous interconnected apparatus of data centers which harms the natural environment by extracting large amounts of water and energy (Leheude, 2021; Rone, 2023). Similarly, descriptions of the internet have heavily leaned on metaphors with land. By describing the internet—a network of interconnected computers—as an ‘electronic frontier’, techno-utopians used colonial imaginings in order to construct the idea of a free, open and uncontrolled natural space. This conception of the internet as a place has become so deeply enmeshed in popular consciousness that it is even reflected in everyday language (i.e. to “visit” a website). Like the cloud, this rhetoric has obscured the ways in which the internet is not “free” but ruled by centrally controlled tech companies. Finally, I will show how these metaphors have been projected back onto the physical world, such as

the call by prominent Silicon Valley elite Balaji Srinivasan (2023) to establish “Network States” by using a “cloud first, land last” model to “crowdfund” territory and establish alternative political communities to challenge states.

Clare Francis (University of Cambridge): *The Tulip and the Eagle:*

*Nature and modernity in the political thought of Muhammad Iqbal*

**Abstract:** Muhammad Iqbal (1877-1938), poet-philosopher and founder of Pakistan, sought to reconstruct Islamic thought and jurisprudence to restore khudi (selfhood) to Muslim individuals and societies, and in pursuit of the Islamic ideal of ethical progress. In this article, I will seek to elucidate the relationship between nature and modernity in Iqbal’s political thought. Nature serves as a symbolic stage in Iqbal’s thought, allowing him to enact the opportunities and tensions of two encounters: first, between pre-modernity and modernity; and second, between mind and body, or reason and intuition. These tensions between modernity and pre-modernity, and mind and body, are enacted through a variety of naturalistic motifs in Iqbal’s poetry, which should be understood as integral to his political thought. Here, the motifs of the eagle and the tulip are of particular importance, for they symbolise the active retention of Islamic inheritance in the face of the encroachment of secular materialism. Even as Iqbal stages these encounters through natural motifs, I will argue that he ultimately rejects these dichotomies. This rejection has three important consequences for his thought. First, he seeks to reconcile Islamic inheritance (body) with both the Islamic ideal of ethical progress and the new knowledge to be gleaned from Western modernity (mind). Second, and crucially, he challenges the claim that mind and body are in inherent conflict, situating the tension between the two as a particularity of Western intellectual history which is antithetical to Islamic thought. Third, he rejects the notion that modernity is a Western phenomenon alone. In examining the relationship between nature and modernity in Iqbal’s thought, I will seek to contribute to two bodies of literature: first, on non-Western



approaches to the relation between political thought and nature; second, on the relationship between the socialised and naturalised human, as exemplified in tensions between mind and body.

Shriya Dasgupta (Pondicherry University) and Oyeshi Ganguly

(Hertie School Berlin): *Jal, Jangal, Zameen: Locating the Adivasi Woman in Postcolonial Environmental Movements*

**Abstract:** This paper explores the historical development of Ecological Marxism and examines its ramifications on contemporary Indian Political Thought. The paper seeks to answer how religious texts and indigenous representative literature lies at the root of the contemporary Indian Leftist Red-Green Theory. Resource exploitation acts as a causal pathway in the female tribal recruitment to the Maoist movement, which traces its roots to the colonial Indian Land Acquisition Act of 1894 and the Criminal Tribes Act which declared Adivasis as habitual criminals. This paper interrogates the link between natural resource scarcity, gender injustice and India's 'single biggest internal security threat. Through a reading of the medieval Mangalkavyas that depict nature as mother, it's concluded that it is one of the earliest forms of resistance against the tragedy of commons and unsustainability inherent in a capitalist society in the subcontinent. This can be linked to the environmental movement coalitions against neoliberal globalization in the works of Archana Prasad and Irfan Habib. The paper also focuses on the colonial exploitation of tribals, through the review of regional literature- Bhagabati Charan Panigrahi's *Shikar* (1935) and Kavita Panjabi's *Unclaimed Harvest: An Oral History of the Tebhaga Women's Movement* (2017)- accounts of the anti-colonial forest rights movements. The depiction of the postcolonial environmental movement has been analyzed using Mahasweta Debi's *Draupadi* (1978). It is argued that participation of the tribal women in the Naxalite-Maoist insurgency elucidates the renewed importance of viewing the continuity of state-sponsored environmental degradation and women's rights abuse in one of Asia's

most mineral-rich yet resource deprived zones, which coincides with the Red Corridor. This paper aims to reconcile the political theories of socialism with ecology in the Global South and concludes by drawing a parallel between James O' Connor's two contradictions analysis (1998) with the present Indian ecosocialism and red-green revolution. The oneness of Adivasi female identity with their bodies as sites of resistance and armed resistance as tools to secure ecological justice and historical invisibility in popular culture are themes explored here.

# Panel 4: Revisiting Origins of Anthropocenic Thinking

*Commentator:* Duncan Kelly; *Chair:* Michael Leger

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Tiancheng Yu (University of St. Andrews): *An Analogy Between Nature and the Sovereign State: Malebranche's Positive Nature and Its Political Metaphor*

**Abstract:** Malebranche, according to his occasionalist metaphysics, understands nature as a holy artefact: it is invented and sustained by God's volition and is regulated through a series of 'natural laws' about movement and mind-body union, in the sense that they are (more properly called) divine positive laws enacted by the 'sovereign legislator' of nature. I believe the frequent, unconventional use of 'sovereign' in his description of God indicates that Malebranche intends to make the analogy between political sovereignty and God's power over the begotten, which embodies a worldview and a political metaphor that emphasize an active and penetrating will. I will try to show that this representative analogy comes from a synthesis of several early modern resources: it includes the Cartesian doctrine of the creation of truth where there is a precedent for calling rules of nature 'natural laws', and the proposal of the sovereign state of Grotius and Hobbes, who subjectivize moral naturality and argue for the positive might of sovereign reason at every level of society; also, that the moral principles of justice and the rules of motion share the name unambiguously makes Malebranche a comrade of Spinoza. In his debate with the traditional concurrentists, while depriving the 'secondary causes' of their cause status and endowing God with the busyness of 'real cause', Malebranche unifies the mode of the

effectiveness of God's sovereignty by putting forward the simplicity principle, and this corresponds to the evolution of moral and legal naturalism towards the modern idea of sovereignty – the idea that weighs the solitary will against the good or perfectness in which there is no longer an inevitable order. This helps us see how Hobbes's famous saying, 'it is not wisdom but authority that makes a law', may have its application to the early modern understanding of nature itself.

Nayeli Riano (Georgetown University): *The 'Barbarity' of Nature:*

*Revisiting the Civilization and Barbarism Debates in Latin American*

*Thought*

**Abstract:** A key element of the development of Latin American political thought was influenced by the Western politicization of nature through its ideas of the 'noble savage' and of 'barbarism'. That these concepts became popularized during the Enlightenment is no coincidence, moreover. The time in which European philosophers were criticizing their contemporary societies connected with the moment that a foreign peoples served as 'proof' for many of their claims about human nature and the opposition between a natural state and the corrupting tendencies of civilization. This history and understanding of the noble savage from a Western standpoint are well-known: Rousseau's *Discourse on the Origins of Inequality Among Men*, Dryden's *The Conquest of Grenada*, and Raynal's *Histoire des Deux Indes* are just a few examples. What is less studied in the history of political thought is how this initial politicization of nature, and its influence in the Americas, developed into a series of debates over the concepts of *civilization* and *barbarism* that became central to the region's political thought. This paper explores how these concepts of civilization and barbarism were used by Latin American thinkers to probe the place of nature within a 'civilizing' project in their own societies. Discussing thinkers like Domingo Faustino Sarmiento, Jose Enrique Rodo, and Jose Carlos Mariategui, it argues that the Latin American intellectual tradition's historic engagement with the concepts of civilization and

barbarism produced a meaningful engagement with the idea of nature and its place in society that sought to break the modern paradigm which defined nature as an antagonistic force to civilization. Rather than treat nature and civilization as opposing forces, the ongoing assessment of what constitutes ‘barbarism’ shifted the attention away from ‘civilization’ as the aim and towards how misunderstandings of nature results in political projects of national development that render nature—or ‘barbarism’—into a necessary threat.

Florian Skelton (Goethe University Frankfurt): *Han Shan in the Anthropocene. On Gary Snyder’s Attempt to “Environmentalize” Eastern Spirituality*

**Abstract:** In an effort to challenge American consumerism that enforces the nature-society dichotomy, the counter-cultural movements from the 50s to the 80s drew inspiration from an influential figure in Eastern spirituality: Han Shan (寒山). Literally translated as “Cold Mountain,” Han Shan is believed to have been a Buddhist monk who lived as a recluse in 8<sup>th</sup> and 9<sup>th</sup> century China. His poetry fascinated Gary Snyder who, in his spiritual quest for a more grounded life in step with nature, translated it into English and turned Han Shan into an eco-spiritual idol for the the beatniks, the hippies, and the Earth First! movement. Today, Han Shan is the most well known Chinese poet in the US. This paper critically investigates Snyder’s work on Han Shan as one of the most influential Western attempts to “environmentalize” Eastern spirituality. For Snyder, Han Shan bridges the gap between the natural and the political by abandoning himself to the landscapes where no apparent subject is experiencing nature. Oscillating between human and more-than-human, Han Shan’s vernacular prose was written under conditions that speak to our current environmental crises: The Tang dynasty was marked by both previously unknown riches and culture as well as the An Lushan rebellion, one of the deadliest calamities in human history. Snyder thus popularized an intriguing philosophy of nature where



civilization, culture, wilderness, destruction, and menace co-exist. However, Snyder privileged an anti-civilizational reading of Han Shan that omits the latter's lively and detailed depiction of human experience. Flattening Han Shan in this way transposed the non-duality of Self and Other into a non-duality of society and nature. The resulting "environmentalized" Han Shan provided a vocabulary to the counter-cultural movements to mobilize a romanticized "nature" against a consumerist society, a trope that I argue went on to undergird a bourgeois-romantic faction in today's Anthropocene camp.

# Biographies

## Keynote Speaker

**Dipesh Chakrabarty** holds a BSc (physics honors) degree from Presidency College, University of Calcutta, a postgraduate Diploma in management (considered equivalent to MBA) from the Indian Institute of Management, Calcutta, and a PhD (history) from the Australian National University. He is currently the Lawrence A. Kimpton Distinguished Service Professor in History, South Asian Languages and Civilizations, and the College. He is the Faculty Director of the University of Chicago Center in Delhi, a faculty fellow of the Chicago Center for Contemporary Theory, an associate of the Departments of English, Comparative Literature, and Cinema and Media Studies, and, by courtesy, a faculty member in the Law School.

He is a founding member of the editorial collective of *Subaltern Studies*, a consulting editor of *Critical Inquiry*, and a founding editor of *Postcolonial Studies*. He has also served on the editorial boards of the *American Historical Review* and *Public Culture*.

He holds several honorary doctorates, including from the University of Antwerp and the École Normale Supérieure Paris, as well as many other distinctions such as the Toynbee Foundation Prize, for contributions to global history, the Tagore Memorial Prize awarded for *The Crises of Civilization*, and Jadunath Sarkar Memorial Gold Medal by the Asiatic Society of Bengal.

His most recent books include *The Climate of History in a Planetary Age* (Chicago, 2021; New Delhi: Primus, 2021) and *One Planet, Many Worlds: The Climate Parallax* (Brandeis, 2023).

## Speakers

**Shriya Dasgupta** (Pondicherry University) is currently pursuing Master's in Politics and International Relations and graduated from the Department of Comparative Literature, Jadavpur University, India. Her research areas include modern South Asian history and politics, gender and intellectual roots of resistance movements.

**Nicolae Biea** (University of Chicago) is a PhD candidate in Political Science working at the intersection between political theory and political economy.

**Clare Francis** (University of Cambridge) is an MPhil student in Politics and International Studies at Trinity College from which she previously graduated First Class with Distinction, before returning to Australia to work in the foreign service. She is particularly interested in twentieth and twenty-first century political thought, spanning ideas of sovereignty, violence, modernity, democracy, and belonging.

**Oyeshi Ganguly** (Hertie School Berlin) is an Indo-German Young Leaders Forum Scholar, currently pursuing her Master's in International Affairs. She obtained her Bachelor's degree in Political Science from the Department of International Relations at Jadavpur University, India. Her research focuses on South Asian Studies, history of postcolonial societies, politics of memory and cultural studies.

**Shreya Khaund** (University of Oxford) holds a master's degree in women's studies from the Tata Institute of Social Sciences in Mumbai. Shreya completed a second master of studies degree in global and imperial history at the University of Oxford in 2022, and is currently working as a research assistant with the Professorship of the History of Modern World at ETH Zurich on a project focusing on childhood histories and the emergence of playground spaces in colonial Asia. Shreya's broader interests are in imperial and transnational networks, South Asian history, issues of migration in borderland states, and colonial and postcolonial theories.

Jacobus Kornelis (**Koen**) **Klein** (University of Leiden) is a Research Master student of Ancient History specialising in urban history and material culture, as well as a BA student of Medieval Literature. Currently, he is involved with the Netherlands Institute for the Near East and chief editor of the Leiden-based Academic Student Journal *Leidschrift*.

**Jasmijn Leeuwenkamp** (University of Amsterdam) is a doctoral candidate in philosophy. Her research focuses on anthropocentrism in human rights discourses and explores the complex interrelations between political philosophy, ecological justice, and rights-based environmental protection strategies.

**Joel Littler** (University of Oxford) is a DPhil candidate in History as a Daiwa Scholar of Japanese Studies at Pembroke College. He was formerly a lecturer at Thammasat University and Mahidol University in Thailand, where he taught philosophy. His research centres on the noncolonial intellectual, cultural, and political phenomena that emerged in nineteenth and early twentieth century Japan as a reaction to the perceived failures of the Meiji Ishin to improve ordinary people's lives. This intersects with his interest in the history of philosophy and religion in Asia's other noncolonised country, Thailand.

**Nayeli Riano** (Georgetown University) is a Ph.D. Candidate in political theory. Her dissertation work is on the development of civilization and barbarism as meaningful political concepts in Latin American thought that help us think about connected topics like colonialism, empire, modernity, and nature.

**Florian Skelton** (Goethe University Frankfurt) is a master's student in Political Theory. He holds a BA in Political Science and Philosophy from the University of Zurich. He works on environmental political theory, specifically on the ways in which contemporary neoliberalism is responding to the climate crises in the form of net zero targets and carbon pricing mechanisms.

**Alina Utrata** (University of Cambridge) is a PhD Candidate in Politics and International Studies. Her research examines technology corporations, specifically focusing on the political theory of the corporation and how contemporary Silicon Valley technology companies may be challenging or affecting the power of the state.

**Phil Xing** (London School of Economics) is a master's student at the Department of International History. His project traces the global political and intellectual contexts of white racial scientists (as well as their contestation with African diaspora thinkers over the concept of civilisation) in the mid-19th century.

**Tiancheng Yu** (University of St. Andrews) graduated from Peking University (2020) with a MPhil in Philosophy. He is currently a PhD student at the School of International Relations, the University of St. Andrews. His research topic is early modern European political theory and the intellectual history of sovereignty.

## Organisers

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