

BOOK REVIEW

Dipesh Chakrabarty, *One Planet, Many Worlds: The Climate Parallax*

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Since publishing his influential 2009 essay ‘The climate of history: four theses’, Dipesh Chakrabarty has developed a humanist form of philosophical anthropology while articulating an increasingly subtle response to climate change. His arguments linking the geological time of the Anthropocene to the time of human history have proved stimulating. This is in part due to Chakrabarty’s admission that subaltern studies, Marxist analysis of capital and postcolonial critique had not equipped him to meet the predicament of climate change, but also to his demand for a ‘species’ history of humanity where others called for more focused accounts of responsibility and change. The article has been *Critical Inquiry*’s most-read and most-cited work over the past twelve months. Yet Chakrabarty’s position has evolved. In a series of articles relating postcolonial studies to capital and climate, for example, he has responded to critics and sharpened his account. *The Climate of History in a Planetary Age* (2021) comprehensively treats the original article and debate since then.

Why follow it so soon? Chakrabarty describes the present, shorter book as both a prequel and sequel to this recent work, taking his philosophical anthropology into political terrain. Initially inspired by his 2017 Mandel Lectures in the Humanities at Brandeis University, it represents a development in some of his most distinctive and long-standing postcolonial critiques. This is an attempt to provincialize Europe in a warming world by engaging with the planetary perspective of Earth system science. His title juxtaposes this scientific perspective of Earth as *one planet* (realized on temporal and spatial scales that outspan human existence), with the *many worlds* of politics. Chakrabarty sees the book’s novel contribution as its deliberate discussion of politics, endeavouring to contribute to the political forms needed to meet planetary emergency, facing the fact that no singular ‘we’ exists to respond to global heating.

His first essay meditates on the pandemic and climate change as consequences of the great acceleration – the increase in population, energy use, carbon dioxide, ocean acidification and so on that took off around 1950, due to the globalization of industrial capitalism. Chakrabarty focuses on the way pandemic circumstances brought a sense of time in which the future was almost impossible to imagine, foreshortened by everyday grappling with vulnerabilities to the microbial. He argues that scaling back the human-modern realm is now required. That argument draws on Michel Foucault’s 1978 account of bio-power; David M. Morens, Gregory K. Folker and Anthony S. Fauci’s 2004 treatment of pandemics as episodes in the evolutionary history of microbes; and Bruno Latour’s picturing of the pursuit of wealth and prosperity since 1950 as an undeclared war with the

entanglements of human, non-human and Earth that the Anthropocene has revealed. This is Chakrabarty's first pass at a politics that expands beyond its traditional conceptual limits in intra-human justice to consider individual humans and their microbiomes as constituting whole living beings (understanding, as biologists long have done, that viruses welcome human mobility and the environmental stresses of rapid economic growth).

One of the most problematic arguments of *The Climate of History* was its assertion that 'Anthropogenic Explanations of Climate Change Spell the Collapse of the Age-old Humanist Distinction between Natural History and Human History'. This impression of the novelty of the Anthropocene might have been dispelled by attention to the considerable work stressing the common link between human and nature in concepts of climate, such as Jan Golinski's *British Weather and the Climate of Enlightenment* (2007), which showed that Enlightenment man was seldom set apart from nature. But Chakrabarty's primary aim had always been to explain how and why an emancipatory humanist could come as late to climate as he did, and why it was possible to overlook the IPCC for so long. Turning his attention to historicity in Chapter 2, he is now more appropriately concerned with the recent origins of a separation between humans and nature, developing a more grounded account of the postcolonial historiography of modernity, which he argues was just as environmentally blind as anti-colonial modernizing nationalisms. Chakrabarty suggests that postcolonial scholars, concerned with freedom and emerging middle classes in India and China, nevertheless inherited a strong human/non-human nature distinction from philosophers of history who argued that history is limited to human affairs. This, he suggests, explains the disorientation and dismembering of different senses of time that accompanies the new need to see humanity as thing, which Latour and Francois Hartog diagnosed in the Anthropocene challenge.

Chakrabarty's final chapter takes his study of different versions of modernity – 'original modern' and 'late modern' – one step further, juxtaposing them with indigeneity and arguments for decoloniality. His principal guides are Donna Haraway's *Staying with the Trouble* (2016), Latour and Déborah Danksowski and Eduardo Viveiros de Castro (building on Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari). Chakrabarty deftly sifts through several stances, like Eric Dean Wilson accounting for the quandary that refrigerants pose for global-warming mitigation and Kathryn Yusoff arguing for *A Billion Black Anthropocenes or None* (2018), to illustrate subtle assumptions about agency that often discount that of late moderns like India and China, and to call analysts to recognize the complex histories underwriting these perspectives. Bringing his own analysis to its point in politics, Chakrabarty's historiographically oriented philosophical anthropology offers a rich and subtle reading of these intellectual traditions. Yet, without engaging in significant emerging literatures on the history and politics of climate science and governance policies, we are left with the somewhat abstract entreaty that, negotiating the fault lines between capitalism, modernity and indigeneity, we must 'make kin, intellectually and across historical difference' (p. 102), with Chakrabarty offering an exemplar in the way Robin Wall Kimmerer has linked biological sciences and indigenous heritage in *Braiding Sweetgrass* (2013). Chakrabarty's book itself makes kin by constantly moving between scientific perspectives, recent commentary and diverse stances in the humanist intellectual tradition, but for all the ethical resonance of his primary contrast between unity and multiplicity, readers may find that the sense of politics that emerges returns too quickly to such generalities to bear clear analytic fruit.