History in a Planetary Age: An Interview with Dipesh Chakrabarty

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The climate of history – and, we may argue, of the social sciences and the humanities more broadly – has been changing in significant ways since the publication of Dipesh Chakrabarty's groundbreaking article "The Climate of History: Four Theses" in 2009. With this exploration of how "anthropogenic explanations of climate change spell the collapse of the age-old humanist distinction between natural history and human history" (2009, p. 201), Chakrabarty, the Lawrence A. Kimpton Distinguished Service Professor of History and South Asian Languages and Civilizations at the University of Chicago, played a decisive role in making the Anthropocene a crucial category for scholars concerned about the human impact on the planet. While this piece sparked a range of debates and questions, such as the suitability of the term "species" in face of the deep social, economic, and political disparities at the heart of humans' impact on the Earth, depictions of the ecological crisis in popular culture and media increasingly suggest humans are a geological force pushing the environment to the brink of collapse. In one way or another, they converge on what Chakrabarty has identified as the limitations of the critique of globalization, which does not address the planetary as an unescapable dimension of human affairs. On a more fundamental level, and already in conversation with the author's more recent scholarship on the topic, our predicament is how to live in "an order that presently seems unimaginable: an order that is not necessarily human dominant" (2021, p. 195).

This is one of the questions animating the chapters of the 2021 book *The Climate of History in a Planetary Age*, in which Chakrabarty does not abandon the concept of Anthropocene,

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but makes the case for the planet as a more capacious category with which to address the type of questions asked and the methodologies developed by the humanities and social sciences. This can be seen as a new twist in Chakrabarty's wide-ranging scholarship, including his renowned previous work on postcolonial studies epitomized in the book *Provincializing Europe: Postcolonial Thought and Historical Difference* (2000). *The Climate of History* once again raises the stakes of related debates by establishing the planet as a heuristic category where the personal, the biological, the political, and the geological intersect. What does it mean, for example, to reconsider the crossroads presented by the many modernizing waves that spread through the Global South in the twentieth century from the viewpoint of today's planetary demands? How can we think from humanistic perspective about a planet that, contrary to the global, cannot be placed "in a communicative relationship with humans?" (2021, p. 70). What can the critical gesture of centering the planetary contribute to some of the most urgent questions, ideas, and anxieties stemming from the ecological crisis across a wide range of disciplines? In this interview, conducted on a cold day in the January of 2023 in Chicago, Chakrabarty offers us new insights onto this rich plethora of questions.

Victoria Saramago and José Augusto Pádua: Can you start by telling us more about how you understand the concept of Anthropocene today and how you discuss it in your recent book, *The Climate of History in a Planetary Age* (2021)?

Dipesh Chakrabarty: Somebody recently asked me why I did not carry on with the concept of Anthropocene. In spite of the importance of those debates on Anthropocene, Capitalocene, Econocene, or Donna Haraway's Chthulucene, I realized that, as a historian and as a humanist, I find two problems with the Anthropocene. Firstly, it is a geological epoch, and geological epochs usually go on for tens of millions of years. In fact, if scientists determine that we are in the Anthropocene, then the Holocene will have been one of the shortest geological epochs. As a historian, the Anthropocene did not offer me a periodizing device suitable for human history, because it carries on beyond humanity. From my disciplinary perspective, I do not possess the knowledge or the skills either to defend or attack the idea of the Anthropocene, because it has to be settled by scientists. The notion of the planet, on the other hand, seemed to provide me with a periodizing moniker that I could use to establish a distinction from the category of the global. All the material that the Anthropocene Working Group has accumulated is factually true and indisputable, so I could say that we have become an earth-system force or a planetary force. I could also say that, as a consequence, the global is no longer an adequate description for the age that we are in. And if there is one thing that historians do, it is name the age, right? Think of feudalism or capitalism. As a historian, I could say that we are moving from a global to a planetary age, but I could not take charge of the word "Anthropocene" in the way that I could take

charge of the words "global" or "planetary". This is a major reason why I eventually adopted the term "planetary". I don't discard the Anthropocene however; there's a chapter about Anthropocene time in my 2021 book, *The Climate of History in a Planetary Age*.

It all began with the French philosopher Catherine Malabou, who proposed that the word "global", as in globalization, is not the same as the word as "global" in global warming. In trying to think about the distinction between the two meanings of the globe, I realized that the second globe could be read as or understood to be the earth system. It is easier to call it planet because other people are talking about, or beginning to talk about it. Gayatri Spivak, Eugene Thacker and others have written about planetarity, for example, even though they mean different things by planet. For thinkers such as Carl Schmitt, on the other hand, global and planet mean the same thing. I have tried to make clear that by planet I mean the earth system, so my approach is more of a conscious uptake of science into humanities than would be true of others who have also been using the word planet. In doing so, I tried to create a periodizing moniker to signal that the human condition has changed.

Victoria Saramago and José Augusto Pádua: Can you talk more about the interplay between global and planetary? Do you see them as opposites?

Dipesh Chakrabarty: First of all, the global and planetary are not binary opposites. I have already received criticism saying I have created a binary, but I have not. I have actually said that it is the intensification of the global, by which I mean the Great Acceleration from the 1950s onward, that has enabled us to see what the planetary is. In a conversation I had with [Bruno] Latour, he made a very interesting point. He said, "it is really interesting that the Earth system is much older than the globe, yet it has become the most recent thing". I replied, "yes, that's because the Cold War and the competition in space produced technology that actually revealed to us the Earth system and how it functions. This stems from questions about whether Mars can be made habitable for human beings, which leads to the question of what makes a planet habitable". Here we are back to the habitability question. And you can look at the Cold War itself as an intensification of modernization, right? And not just in the camps, but also through de-colonization, through various modernization projects. If you go back to the 1950s, I do not think you would find a nation that was rejecting modernization. You'd find thinkers like [Mohandas (Mahatma)] Gandhi who didn't want industrialization, but even [Franz] Fanon or [Aimé] Césaire were in favor of industrialization.

Victoria Saramago and José Augusto Pádua: In Brazil it was the same.

Dipesh Chakrabarty: Exactly. Everybody was looking at Brazil, like Japan did once. People were looking at Brazil to see what was the magic of industrialization, how did it happen.

Victoria Saramago and José Augusto Pádua: But historians normally worked with the global, and the intensification that made the acceleration reveal the planet, in my view, is really key to think about the Anthropocene.

Dipesh Chakrabarty: Right.

Victoria Saramago and José Augusto Pádua: Let us go back to your book.

Dipesh Chakrabarty: Well, first of all, for every other book I've written as a historian, there were models. *Provincializing Europe* did not have a model, but still the debates in postcolonialism about difference, derivativeness, and originality were ongoing. *The Climate of History in the Platenary Age* was written while arguing with people who criticized me ever since I wrote my 2009 essay, "The Climate of History: Four Theses". I valued but did not always agree with the criticism I received. But the criticism forced me to ask myself, what am I really saying? The book was thus shaped by a lot of the debates around the "four theses" essay (now a chapter in the book in a revised form). The first proposition the book tries to make is about the collapse of the distinction between natural history and human history. That was for me an eye opener, because I was an anti-colonial historian. Frankly, I was not even an environmental historian. In subaltern studies there was not much environmentalism, not even in postcolonialism in the 1980s and 1990s, which is why I say that we were all environmentally blind. We believed implicitly in development/modernization and were indifferent to "natural" history, considering it to be a specialized domain of scientists. Until you get the first postcolonial book on this environment, which was Rob Nixon's (2011), it was all very vague. As I said, development was an implicit assumption on everybody's part.

Victoria Saramago and José Augusto Pádua: This is the first point. You mentioned three.

Dipesh Chakrabarty: The second is that there has been a shift in the nature of the time that humans are living in. We are no longer just in the global phase, and the expression "global history" does not quite get fully what we are going through. We have become planetary. These are the two points I would make as a historian. I make the third point, more as a thinker than as a historian, to update Hannah Arendt on the human condition. Arendt concludes *The Human Condition* by discussing the Sputnik launch, and saying that humanity will now survive as a species because it can go to other planets, but it will suffer Earth-alienation. My book is by implication saying "no" to this proposition. Humanity may not survive, not even on this planet, and alienation may be too high a price. We depend too much on the Earth system, so alienation is not only a psychological or philosophical

alienation from what's familiar, it is actually alienation from gravity, from Earth's microbes, from bacteria. An alienation that could make humans unviable as a proposition. This third point is thus a more philosophical one in proposing that the human condition has changed.

Victoria Saramago and José Augusto Pádua: How do you see responses to your work, as well as other contributions, that have been shaping debates on the Anthropocene these past years?

Dipesh Chakrabarty: In the United States there have been two forums on *The Climate of History* in which I participated. One was a special issue published in the political science journal *Review of Politics* and the other one, also a special issue, appeared in the *Journal of Environmental Philosophy*. I was used to criticism from Marxist scholars, because the book was in conversation with the left critique, while I saw myself broadly on the left, but also arguing with those on the left. The new criticism I get now is from decolonial scholars working on Indigenous philosophy. I wrote recently a piece mainly discussing the work of Eduardo Viveiros de Castro, and I feel I am in a conversation with him. Actually, I have a book coming out which engages more deeply with his work. But those who would be even more intellectually opposed to my work than he would be decolonial scholars working along the lines of Walter Mignolo's work, I think. That is, those wanting to roll back modernity conceptually, reaching out to worlds before 1492. Many of the criticisms I have had in print, in both of these forums [the *Review of Politics* and the *Journal of Environmental Philosophy*], have been from scholars who argue that I am not taking Indigenous perspectives into account and I am not doing work that could be called "decolonial". Now, Viveiros de Castro himself says that there are about 370 million Indigenous people, by his count, whereas the number of people who desire some kind of modernization in Asia, Africa, and Latin America, by his count, is 3.5 billion. So, there is here a real intellectual divide. In my view, those who speak in the name of Indigenous people underestimate or deny their history of modernization. I mean, there are Maori doctors, there are Indigenous professors of philosophy. These critics do not deal with the fact that even Robin Wall Kimmerer, for instance, the writer celebrated as a Native American thinker is actually herself a trained botanist. She has critiques of biology, but she does not dismiss it.

Victoria Saramago and José Augusto Pádua: The challenge is how to reinvent Indigeneity without this romanticized view.

Dipesh Chakrabarty: To me this all sounds very romantic, yet it is created by people who are totally modern, who are in the university sector, who are educated. I often feel that postcolonialism in its time was more of an intellectual movement while some decolonial

thinkers are also activists. But there are interesting overlaps between these moments. Take the connections between [Gilles] Deleuze and [Félix] Guattari, and the work of Viveiros de Castro. Deleuze and Guattari read European anthropologists working on Africa and Latin America. They were reading them to construct an idea like nomadism, right? The opposition of the nomad versus the sedentary or settled population underwrote the idea of the state. Viveiros de Castro works with and further develops, with much creativity, this opposition. But the assumed clash between European and Indigenous ideas sounds just too neat for me – so much has happened in the in-between space once the Indigenous survived the initial mayhem and onslaught. I still find some – not all – versions of the decolonial more political than intellectual. They make complex histories too simple.

Victoria Saramago and José Augusto Pádua: Can you tell us more about your views on Bruno Latour's anthropology of the moderns?

Dipesh Chakrabarty: I am deeply indebted to his thoughts. His anthropology of the modern has some fundamental insights into what he calls "the constitution of the modern". My friendly disagreement with Latour, and even with [Philippe] Descola, to some extent, is that they think of modernity as rooted in an oppositional structure of nature and society. In their work, however, sometimes the opposition works as an original sin. It is like an invariant structure that begins, let us say, in the 15th century and then runs right through the years, causing the same problems all the time. In contrast, I'm more of a Foucauldian in thinking that, yes, that structure may still exist and you might see it, but it does not have the same salience or valence at every point on the historical trajectory of the modern. But I do very much like Latour's idea of what he calls hybridization, the process that constantly undermines the nature/society opposition by producing entities that are neither fully natural nor fully social. That to me is not only about structure but also about history.

Victoria Saramago and José Augusto Pádua: The national question is central in Latin America. The process of national building in the region began in the 19th century with the independences of numerous countries. But such a process took place under a strong presence economically and culturally of the former colonial regime. Portions of this process remains present in Latin American realities until today. But the point is, environmental historians have shown that the background was no longer background, also in specific studies on a national and local scale. In the context of the convergence of the global and the planetary, the discussion acquires greater visibility and intensity.

Dipesh Chakrabarty: There have been several strands of thought even from romanticism, or rather from romantic literature, that offer critiques of industrialization and modernization.

Even [Martin] Heidegger, in the 20th century, carries on with this romantic view that we were doing something to the background. Or we can go back to the way that [Karl] Marx reads the physiocrats. Two or three books that have come out on Marxist ecology show that this idea that the background was no longer the background was visible in many national and even sometimes global contexts. When the British came to India, they were very interested in teak tree lumber for shipbuilding, from the 17th and into the 18th and 19th centuries. The reason was that they had cut down all their oak trees to make ships. Teak had the same properties as oak, a property that stopped nails from rusting. The British were themselves aware that they destroyed the oak forests in becoming an empire. Ottoman Empire had run out of wood. And I think you told me, or I read somewhere, that Brazil was named after a wood.

Victoria Saramago and José Augusto Pádua: Yes, Brazilian wood. In the case of Brazil, 19th-century intellectuals expressed concern about the climate, not in the sense of climate change, but in the sense of desiccation. It nonetheless was always at a local level, only rarely on a global.

Dipesh Chakrabarty: There is for sure a difference of scale, as you said, as the Earth system is bigger. But the other difference is categorical: one could see these problems as destruction of nature or domination of nature. Often I have to explain that in my understanding the Earth system is not the same as nature, just as we have made a categorical shift away from the global. But these are the precursors of the shift.

Victoria Saramago and José Augusto Pádua: Indeed, but the Anthropocene question is the planet.

Dipesh Chakrabarty: Yeah. It is a new thing and it is not nature. An example of such precursors can be found in [Michel] Foucault when he said that the population has become a bio-political category, when he said that population is now the same kind of category as forests for Germans in the early 19th century. For them, trees are biological products, but humans have to manage the forests. Foucault's biopolitics does not grasp the Earth system; it still focuses on the human management of biological products or biological entities. As such, his thoughts are a precursor. We move from bio-politics to grasping the biosphere politically.

Victoria Saramago and José Augusto Pádua: So is the emergence of Earth system as a discipline almost an epiphany on how should we can think more planetarily?

Dipesh Chakrabarty: There are moments, yes. With Soviet scholars like Vladimir Vernadsky, you begin to clearly see that it has to do with the rise of systems theory from the 1920s to the 1940s. Thermodynamics, in particular, becomes very important to understand why disorder happens, and the physicist Erwin Schrödinger gave a series of lectures in Dublin in 1939 called "What Is Life," which James Lovelock and his colleagues in NASA read while debating the possibility of life on Mars. If you read those lectures, you will find that they are basically the work of a physicist trying to understand life by applying thermodynamics. Think of life as a system; I can think of your body or my body as a system with the problem of entropy. None of us would be alive if we did not constantly supply our bodies with fresh energy as food. Even with fresh energy, they are not eternal; the internal disorder keeps increasing over time. We get old, some people explain, or used to explain more commonly in the 1980s, aging is a process of accumulation of errors in the reproduction of bodily cells. It reproduces you but you do not look like the same person.

Victoria Saramago and José Augusto Pádua: In this case, in the Earth system framework, do you find it necessary or even possible to reframe historical analysis of the local and national in the broader context of the Anthropocene?

Dipesh Chakrabarty: Yes, we have to learn to think about the planetary and the local or the regional together. There are many examples I can give. From the very personal to the global. A global one is the pandemic, which requires you to make very personal decisions. Will I wear a mask, will I not wear a mask, will I ask others to wear masks? The question of human politeness was very foundational to the pandemic. How much distance do I keep? Do I make mask wearing compulsory? Is it a political decision? Do governments regulate it? It can be personal, regional, or governmental, but it also goes to global issues: Should the World Health Organization be given more powers to force countries to disclose information? A second example I give sometimes is the distinction between the age of your body and the age of the design of your body. I say, look, this body is your own. It was born with you, it will die with you. But it took millions of years to design this body, right? What is planetary then? You cannot imagine any human artifact without assuming its opposable digits, but the history of that has to do with grasping branches so that you could hang from them. Monkeys have opposable digits to some degree, but that is because there is a history of having to grasp branches and hang from them to climb trees. Most of the time the knowledge that this is an evolutionary design would not matter to you. It is only when I have diabetes that I may be reminded the fact that the rate at which human muscles take up sugar and release it still has to do with the history of hunting and gathering. When my doctor explained this to me, I said, "So when I go on my treadmill, I am going hunting and gathering?" In a moment of crisis as this one, deep history is something that comes into

play. I will give you another example. I am from Bengal in India, where the Ganges comes into the ocean. In the delta region, there are many poor fishing communities. Women catch small fish by standing in the rivers up to their waist. As a consequence of sea level rise, the river water is becoming salty, and the salt encourages infections in their reproductive organs, including the uterus. A band of malicious doctors started doing hysterectomies on these poor women, charging them money, taking out their uterus. Because of the surgery, it becomes very difficult for them to lift the objects they need to carry around in their everyday lives. This destroys these women's lives, so feminists are now trying to lobby the government to regulate hysterectomies. I would have never connected hysterectomies to climate change. That's why I think there's room for activism at different levels, and the more we can connect them, the better. This does not at all displace the local. If anything, it is articulative of the local.

Victoria Saramago and José Augusto Pádua: In the chapter, "The Difficulty of Being Modern" from *The Climate of History*, you discuss the mismatch or incompatibility between this very 20th-century "secular religion of modernization" that frames this collective desire for energy-intensive goods in the context of developing countries. Considering the growing presence of environmental concerns in contemporary political agendas in the Global South, can you tell us more about how you see this tension between development, modernization, and sustainability?

Dipesh Chakrabarty: Let us start with [Joe] Biden's climate bill, which is very interesting, because it is going to make hundreds of billions of dollars available to universities mainly for research into battery technology for electric cars. Biden wants an electric car revolution in America, but this revolution is dependent on getting lithium from Chile. In a trip to Chile around the end of September, I met a Chilean scholar, a microbiologist who, along with an Amsterdam-based anthropologist, works on the lithium and salt mines. They had sent me their papers saying that they found my work useful. I was very interested in learning more about the type of scholarship emerging around such extraction economies. Cristina Dorador, the microbiologist and an Indigenous person, works on bacterial formation in the lithium mines and in the salt mines. While in Santiago, she showed me a number of photos of the bacterial formations in the mines, bacterial formations that are so thick that you sometimes see them as red bands on white. Their work documents how lithium and salt mining are completely destroying the bacterial world, which is so critical to sustaining nonhuman life in those regions. Yet, the American Dream of electric car revolution is based on lithium from Chile. It was such an eye-opening moment for me that brings us back to this conundrum, for modernization has become a conundrum for us. On the one hand, for people who are privileged like myself or you, it is very hard to say to poor people,

don't eat more. You simply cannot say that. How to deal with all these negative aspects of modernization – this is a very tough question. Once I said to Latour, "you have in the world now eight billion people who have to eat", and he says, "I find it a terrorizing question".

This is why I go back to the question of scale as a historian. If human population were three billion now, clearly the problem would not be so intense. In the year of 1986, we had the first one billion humans who were able to buy fridges and cars – they became consumers. Now, this figure is around four, maybe five. So we have three, four billion people not living so well, but half of humanity lives reasonably well. The year of 2007 is when half of humanity became urban dwelling. People do not usually realize that 87% of the fossil fuels that humans have ever used have been used after 1950. The scale has been just going up, and when people earn more money, they want to travel and to eat more protein. Left to itself, the Earth would not produce as many cattle, pigs, goats or chicken as we might want to eat. We have thus had to industrialize certain forms of life such as cattle stock, chicken, or salmon, in order to provide this protein. I depend on salmon because I am diabetic and I need the omega-3, so I'm a case in point. But we are now living longer. Not always in good health, but you know, we have a pharmaceutical industry, which doesn't cure illness but helps you survive and manage your illness. Asia now supplies 90% of the world's fish. The literature on salmon farming shows that it sometimes produces dead zones underneath in the sea due to the food and medicines the fish are given. Another interesting example is that of housing. China pulls people out of poverty by building more houses. India, China, and the United States are the three countries where there's a construction boom going on. In India the demand for sand has tripled in the last 15 or 16 years. You cannot use desert sand for building so you have to get sand either from rivers or from coasts. Humans, however, are using up sand at a rate that is faster than the rate at which sand is produced by rivers and beaches. Singapore has increased its area by a third by importing sand from Cambodia, but when Cambodia stopped exporting, they started importing sand from Europe, because their population is growing. So sand has become a scarce commodity, and in India is full of illegal sand mafia. They are destroying the rivers by illegally removing sand. Studies show that this affects local ecologies in devastating ways. In summary, there is the ethics of providing housing for the poor on the one hand, and there are the sheer material limits you face when you have to provide housing for so many people.

Victoria Saramago and José Augusto Pádua: *Provincializing Europe* was a landmark in postcolonial studies. Kathleen Morrison has been talking about provincializing the Anthropocene. Do you consider this idea promising from a theoretical and analytical point of view? We are not referring exactly to the long perspectives she wants to take, but rather to her proposal of not taking European economic history as the reference for the whole discussion. In *The Climate of History*, you said that the dissemination of climate science

to the public is largely dominated by western authors, which reveals something about the historical capacity of the imperial west to speak on behalf of universals. Do you see the possibility of some change in this reality?

Dipesh Chakrabarty: I see what Morrison was trying to do, and it was not just her. Think of Bill Ruddiman, who said it began with agriculture. In some ways, Morrison was trying to provincialize the Anthropocene by saying it is not just European countries, it is also other parts of the world. This really is a debate about when does the Anthropocene start, right? I moved away from this debate because I am increasingly interested not the beginning, but in what happens in the course of history, in the fact that everything rises exponentially from the 1950s on, and then even more exponentially from the 1980s when China begins to organize and India opens up. In that sense, we are moving into the Asian Anthropocene. My project was not about determining who is guilty of this mess, because this mess has come about with shared responsibilities of different kinds. European empires are responsible for sure, but the third-world modernizers who thought of modernization as part of welfare justice and these things, they also were responsible. I respect what Morrison is doing, but it is not my project. What I am trying to do in the work about climate change is to talk about other species, particularly microbiome and the bacteria. In this sense, provincializing the human more than provincializing Anthropocene. Humans are a minority form of life; microbes form the majority of life-forms.

Now, going back to the west and climate change. Many Indian scientists are part of the IPCC [Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change]. They write specialist papers, but I have not seen any general book coming out of India explaining what climate change is. In contrast, there are very good books on globalization published in India by Indian academics, mainly economists. Why is it that when it comes to explaining climate change as such, it is scientists in western countries, such as Germany, France, United States, Great Britain, or Australia, who write all these general books trying to explain to their citizens what climate change is? James Hansen is an example. When I went back home to India and spoke to my friends, they were only interested in blaming the west. They were still living in a world in which the west – even the modern world – was really bad and caused all the devastation. They thought: we bear no responsibility; we should modernize and develop. They could only speak by dividing up humanity into privileged and underprivileged, whereas when you read these scientists, rightly or wrongly, they speak to humanity, even when they address themselves to the citizens of a particular country. I realized then that American universities have this capacity, or western universities, to produce this voice, and my voice was part of that voice. I work in Chicago and I am encouraged to do this. Nobody ever said, Dipesh, you were employed to teach Indian history, why are you doing this stuff? Rather colleagues sometimes congratulated me for showing leadership. My positions have

been argued against but I have been encouraged as well. It was somewhat the same when I was working on *Provincializing Europe* and trying to write some general critiques of the discipline of History. My Indian friends, even friends in subaltern studies said that these were problems for western scholars to work, they do it much better, they know much more, they know more about western historiography than I would know about it. They implicitly said, "you should not even try it". There was this sense even among these friends – gently expressed, of course – that I was doing something illegitimate, something pretentious, that I was being too big for my boots. I wrote the "The Climate of History: Four Theses" essay first in my own language, in Bengali, and nobody was interested. Then when I wrote it in English and it traveled almost everywhere. I realized that what I am doing is part of the legacy of imperial universities. On the other end, it is only from within them that I can speak of empires, in the same way that I can speak of third world modernizers, though in thinking about the latter I do go back to my experience of growing up in India.

Victoria Saramago and José Augusto Pádua: In *The Ends of the World* (2016), Déborah Danowski and Eduardo Viveiros de Castro draw upon extensive scholarship on Amerindian thought to ask to what extent for this line of thinking the end of humans is co-substantial with the end of the world. But more fundamental is their questioning of the category of human in a different key, such as the one taken from Marxist critiques on the Anthropocene. They bring up this relationality of the very understanding of humans that extend beyond western understandings of the term. Debates on the Anthropocene have prompted us to reassess a number of crucial categories, such as species, world, planet, global, capital, so many categories. Do you see any productive areas for the reassessment of the category of the human based on non-western epistemologies that have not been sufficiently explored in debates on the Anthropocene? You already hinted at that in your previous answer.

Dipesh Chakrabarty: Let me start from the proposition that what we are facing is a conundrum. Viveiros de Castro actually expresses the conundrum in a chilling manner. In the book he wrote with Danowski, they give statistics, 370 million Indigenous people versus 3.5 billion people wanting and waiting to be modernized. He says there is a lot of wisdom in Indigenous thinking, and I totally agree. But he says, and this is what I found chilling, "maybe it is in a post-catastrophic world" and I'm trying to remember what he says in English – he says that when human capacities have been diminished, the wisdom of these small groups will become relevant. He is actually saying the same thing as I am saying but he is putting it more in a tone of desperation. For him, something catastrophic needs to happen before we can make this wisdom of Amerindian or Indigenous thought useful for us. The only thing I have to say in response to that is one cannot even make the assumption that a catastrophe will give humanity another chance. It may not. Besides, the catastrophe in

question will not be a single event in human terms, it will be a cascade of small catastrophes. And the first victims will be the poor and the underprivileged humans, not to speak of nonhuman lives. We cannot wish or even wait for a catastrophe (I think de Castro will agree with me on this point). The question then is: what do we do with that wisdom now, before the catastrophe? As a historian, I think that there is a whole history of technology enabling us to forget that the intimations of what I call the planetary. One example I think of today is the seasons. Modern technology has tried to make humans overcome, to some extent, the inconveniences posed by seasons. The British used to take credit in India for building the first all-weather, mechanized roads. Even Joseph Proudhon, the French philosopher, wrote paragraphs in praise of railways because they allow traveling come hell or sunshine. Actually, the seasonality of clouds, particularly in the Holocene, has been central to the development of agriculture. In Indian society, seasons were a matter of life and death: too much rain could destroy crops, but drought could kill crops too. I grew up in India knowing that mango was a summer fruit, but now, thanks to refrigeration, I eat mangoes every day if I want. We have to re-learn how to make seasons and seasonality important to us, and the only way to do that, given that we are living more in cities, is to have urban agriculture. Make cities include agriculture, make agriculture vertical, such as rooftop agriculture or agriculture on the pavements. We need a complete urban revolution. In sum, seasonality is one way in which I think the planet reminds us of its existence, and we need to become creatively dependent on it. Edward Wilson would have said we need to scale back. We are not going to reverse the ship of modernization and urbanization. So many people want this, as well as politicians who want this to happen. It is not a matter of turning the ship around, but it should not be a question either of waiting for a catastrophe. We have to tell the truth without making people feel either guilty or desperate.

Victoria Saramago and José Augusto Pádua: In your intellectual path, you establish a dialogue but do not directly engage with areas of inquiry such as environmental history and big history. You do not seem to see yourself as an environmental historian.

Dipesh Chakrabarty: No.

Victoria Saramago and José Augusto Pádua: But something that stands out in your work is your background not only in historical analysis but also in social theory. You have brought to the debate about the planet, the global, and climate change, a much stronger theoretical density than what is usually found in the literature on environmental history. Two concepts that you have used in a very generative way, in the context of the Anthropocene, are Carl Schmitt's notion of unencumbered technology and Karl Jaspers's epochal consciousness. Can you talk more about these topics?

Dipesh Chakrabarty: Broadly my relationship to theory or to philosophy is the following: I am a historian, I love facts, I love knowing facts, I love the archives, but I am also an impatient student of history in the sense that a typical historian, as in a Borgesian dream, would want to know the history of every part of the world in order to know the history of the world. I give the example of a friend of mine who is a historian in India. India has so many provinces, 25 or something like that, and none of us knows the history evenly. This friend's ambition is to read some books about every part of the country in order to claim he is an Indian historian. I feel impatient about that, because I just feel that life is not long enough; therefore, thinking has to be a shortcut through the wealth of facts, right? Except that I'm not like a philosopher, as philosophers are impatient about facts. I remember hearing or reading a story about a historian friend giving [Jacques] Derrida a book of history, and Derrida giving it back saying there were too many facts. I do not think there are too many facts, but I also think that you have to learn to think through the methods of a historian, not just tell a narrative. The way I do this is by putting pressure on historical methods or categories. Because I have come having done some physics and geology in my undergraduate years and business management for my master's degree, I see that every discipline has insights that give you a certain rigor but every discipline is also a combination of blindness and insight, in Paul de Man's sense. Once you go to another discipline, you see what your own blindspots are. Every discipline has its externalities, and the externality of history that I was thinking through in *Provincializing Europe* was memory, minority history, those categories. Here, the externality of history I think about in my climate book is deep history. Evolution as history. Geology as history. In some ways, I put pressure on these.

Most of the time, intellectual traditions, western or not, are like trees with very dense foliage. Most of us work on the canopy, but we forget the trunk. Today I was talking to a doctoral student who works on the history of science, social constructionism, and scientific realism. I told her that, behind every question that is a question in her field, there's a larger question. It is as if somebody had just gone underneath the chess board and you could not see them moving things around. And I said that the closer you get to the trunk, the more your work will be of interest to others. My work is not of interest to everybody, but I have come to develop a form of writing where I can see that my work speaks to a lot of people in literature, art history, and philosophy departments. I think this happens because I try to get to a question that is more fundamental than a standard historical question. Trying to be in conversation with Hannah Arendt or with Carl Schmitt is invigorating, because these are people who cut to to the chase. They get to the more fundamental questions. Sometimes they are schematic. For instance, Schmitt will give an idea that the water was never split before, or Deleuze and Guattari's idea that clans divide territories but not land. These ideas help you see the planetary in the local. Otherwise, the local will seem only local. When

I read about evolution now, I easily see how the design of your body is millions of years old. I now see it. When I look at landscapes now, having read geology, I see cataclysms, catastrophes in the geological history of the world. I do not see landscape as serene; Lake Michigan looks serene, but I think of the ice moving, creating this lake. When you read these other disciplines that think in the very long term, you have new eyes, which a simple training in recorded history will not give you. So I struggle with the blindness that comes with my discipline – along with its insights.

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