

THE PLANETARY TURN IN HUMAN HISTORY

**DIPESH CHAKRABARTY**



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THE PLANETARY TURN IN HUMAN HISTORY

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Let me begin by explaining what I mean by “The planetary turn in human history”. I don’t mean, that the global age is over, but I mean that the accentuation or intensification of economic and cultural globalization of the last, let’s say, 70 years since the war, has now indeed forced us even as historians to reckon with something that I think is distinct from the globe, something that I call the planet. I will shortly explain what the planet is but very briefly let me just say what I mean by globe. I mean the way over the over the last 500 years, from the expansion of Europe and European empires, colonization and take-over of other people’s lands, enslavement of people for trans-Atlantic slavery, the development of technology, deep sea navigation, then of course air navigation and eventually of space, we have connected the sphere we live on into what you might call a globe. So, the globe is really a result, at least for the major part of its history, of what Heidegger once called “Europeanization of the earth”. When did the process of Europeanization end? There are different opinions on that. In his “Nomos of the earth”,

Carl Schmitt argued that it was in 1823 with the announcement of the Monroe Doctrine and the appearance of America as a regional power, that the Europeanization ends, but I would argue, that the Europeanization process actually went on until the decolonization of the 1950s and 60s. But we don't need to debate that here. Suffice it to say that the globe is something I think of as an entity that was created by humans and therefore humans are central to the story of the making of the globe – the making of global history. In sum, humans are the main protagonists of global history.

By planetary history, I'll mean the much longer history of the ways in which geological and biological processes have combined on this planet to help it sustain complex and multicellular forms of life for hundreds of millions of years. My point is that environmental crises caused by intensification of extractive capitalist globalization have made this planet move from being an object of specialist scientific knowledge to being an item of everyday news. That's the point I'm going to come to later in this talk, but I begin with a discussion of two assumptions that have underlined the academic discipline of history from the 19th century with the rise of the social sciences and the social sciences. One of these assumptions entailed a separation of non-human history from human history. So, if you go back to the 18th century, there are a lot of Christian histories, that actually don't make this separation. Buffon's "Seven Epochs of Man" doesn't make this separation, but over the 19th century social sciences become distinct from the physical sciences. Clearly, one source of the separation was the influential post-Enlightenment philosophical idea that

while nature was subject to the necessity of its laws, human history was about the relationship between necessity and freedom. This becomes almost an axiom in humanist history writing and I can kind of trace a line backwards in European scholarship. Beginning with the English scholarship let's say E. H. Carr's Trevelyan lectures of 1961 "What is history?" going back to the Oxford philosopher Robin Collingwood, R. G. Collingwood, whose *The Idea of History* published posthumously in the mid-1940s, a book that was itself influenced by Croce's ideas about history, particularly his lectures on theories of history published towards the end or immediately after the end of the Great War, where he famously said "All history is contemporary history."

If you traced the connection further back, you'll see that Croce himself was influenced by a German economist about whom more soon. In an essay about the history of nature and history, Croce argued that the history of nature was so only in name for natural history he said was mainly an exercise in classification. He acknowledged that even in human history there existed a natural history, there could be a natural history of humans, but one could not convert it back into "history" in a humanist sense, because what was natural history in the history of humans was mainly a matter of describing, classifying, and arranging objects and information whereas human history clearly had to do with motivations. From another essay of Croce published later we come to know that the idea of this distinction between natural and human history was triggered for him by the remarks of a German economist, Friedrich von Gottl-Ottlilienfeld, made in 1903 at the seventh congress of German historians, held in Heidelberg. Gottl-Ottlilienfeld's lecture was

directed against the historian Karl Lamprecht. It was later published under the title "die Grenzen der Geschichte" in 1904. He energetically denied the community and even affinity of the historian with the geologist. He said, that the historian has his object events – "das Geschehen" – and the geologists have their stratifications – "die Sichtung" – and this difference called for the emancipation of historical thought from the naturalistic.

This emphasis on the distinction was thus reinforced at the beginning of the 20th century and remained very strong when the Oxford philosopher Robin Collingwood, a disciple and a translator of Croce, wrote his lectures and notes that were posthumously published in 1946 as *The Idea of History*. By the time Collingwood was arguing thus, there were around him a bunch of philosophers, including the biologist philosopher, J.B.S. Haldane, who were arguing for a unity of human history and natural history. There was, of course, Whitehead and there was the Australian philosopher, Samuel Alexander, a colleague of Collingwood. Collingwood's discussion of history is in part a radical argument against these philosophers and particularly against Samuel Alexander who in the 1930s published an essay called "The Historicity of Things.", In that article, Alexander invited historians to join hands with philosophers like himself who took a historical view of nature. Collingwood quite clearly rejected the invitation. He was ready to grant that that astronomy gives us a celestial history, modern biology includes biological history, modern geology is a geological history but he claimed that none of these things were history in the human sense, because the chronology of developments in

nature indicated the "time full-ness" of nature but this was not history, that just as history for history was not the same thing as change. Collingwood, as I have said, granted that there was a natural side to human history. This meant that, for him, not all human actions were the subject matter for history. He argued further that so far as a man's conduct is determined by what we call is animal nature – such as his impulses or appetites – it is non-historical, for the processes of those activities are natural processes. As a historian, we are not interested in the fact – I'm quoting him – that humans eat, and sleep, and make love, and thus satisfy their natural appetites, but – and this was his point – the historian was interested in the social side of these activities, human-created thought-frameworks within which these appetites find satisfaction in ways sanctioned by convention and morality.

This was the first assumption, I would argue, of humanist history, the separation of natural and human histories. The second assumption was a closely related one that has in fact increasingly become important in history-writing, and this is the assumption that human histories have to do with ideas and practices of freedom and emancipation. In fact, from the 1960s on, these have been driving ideas in writing history debates about history and memory, history and other forms of the past. In Australian Aboriginal history, for instance, – a subdiscipline that emerged in the 1980s – questions were raised about whether dancing or story-telling or other kinds of performances of the past were also legitimate ways of history-making. We have had similar debates almost in every country about whether the academic discipline of history was

that only enterprise that had legitimate claims on human past-making or whether there other kinds of past-making that are more conducive to emerging and divergent form of democracies in the world. But behind the idea of democracy is of course the idea of increasing rights, the capacity for self-representation, and all of these things are somewhat anticipated in what Collingwood would call the philosophy of history, which was somewhat different from what Voltaire meant by the expression "philosophy of history" even though he coined that expression by our reckoning.

The idea that human history was the story of human search for freedom may find its roots going back to Hegel's philosophy of history but it really comes into its own in the second half of the 19th century, especially in the idea of progress, Marxism was one variant of it, and then it re-appears in different shapes and sizes in the 20th century under a variety of names such as Industrialization, Modernization, Development, and so on, all variants of the idea of emancipation. Jürgen Osterhammel has pointed out that many of the roots of the increasingly popular idea of emancipation and its cognates "freedom" and "liberty" definitely go back to the 19th century, at least to when we hear of the emancipation of slaves. Osterhammel actually characterizes the 19th century as a century of emancipation. This was the time, he says, when the word "emancipation" derived from roman law and emphatically European, came to be applied to the world as a whole in the 19th century wore on. As we come into the 20th century, we see that this was a word that was taken up by almost every people. So, the idea of emancipation comes closer to the way that Hannah Arendt

actually interpreted it in one of her posthumously published lectures called "The Freedom to be Free" where she actually argued, referring to the late 18th and 19th century revolutions, that a fundamental relationship existed within the idea of freedom between two things: one is freedom from fear and the other is freedom from want, what we today might call "freedom from poverty." It was this dual engine of a composite desire for freedom from having to fear the white man and for freedom from hunger and poverty, that drove the anti-colonial and revolutionary movements in Asia and Africa in the mid- 20th century. Imaginations of freedom in that sense begin a new non-western life in the 1950s and 60s. Somewhat similar ideas of freedom have had their lives in the West too: remember that by the time consumer gadgets like washing machines and refrigerators appeared on the scene, they were actually all advertised in the 50s and 60s as machines that would emancipate women from the drudgery of household work. This desire for modernization as the realization of freedom eventually blends later in the century 20th with the idea of globalization and remains tinged with an earnestness that is still visible. In the time of Deng Xiaoping in China, when he announced the four modernization programs in the late 1970s, and in Manmohan Singh time India's finance minister in 1991 when India liberalized its economy, this has been the rhetoric of appeal - we need fossils to move millions out of poverty. This is still the ground for how China or India would justify the use of coal or Australia would defend their export of coal to these countries. All this, I would argue, is a continuation of that idea of freedom.

So, if you look at the decolonizing movements that want to modernize their nations, the project of Europeanization of the world or the earth but without direct European domination continued. One of the best expressions of that trend was the famous Martinique politician and postcolonial thinker and poet Aimé Césaire. Césaire argued in his book *Discourse on Colonialism* that colonial rule was a matter of Europeans promising modernity, but not delivering all that promise. He said the proof was that in his time it were the indigenous peoples of Africa and Asia who are demanding schools, hospitals, and factories that colonialist Europe refused them. It's the colonized person who wants to move forward and the colonizer, who holds things back. I would say that this has been a basic assumption in writing history into the late 20th century. True, from the 1970s, there have been important other movements: the environmentalist movement, indigenous people's movements happened, civil liberties movement, the feminist movement, and so on. You get the picture: some environmentalists were making us aware of what technology and modernization were doing to the environment, but humans were also demanding more rights and more freedoms and more emancipation and we usually connected these two developments by arguing the environmental degradation followed from problems of inequalities and the lack of social justice. Questions of freedom reigned and perhaps still do reign supreme.

What I will share is my impression of two histories that developed in parallel, globally, from the 1950s onward. At the end of the Second World War, many new nations emerged,

including India and Pakistan, and later Bangladesh. Colonial rule was ending, the Second World War had ended, and the Cold War had started. The Soviet Union and the United States became the two main superpowers. As part of the Cold War, a competition in space began. For a while in the 1950s, the Soviet Union seemed to be winning. Alongside this, because nuclear weapons had been invented, and because the space competition was intensifying, there was already conversation—during the Second World War—about whether weapons could be made out of “weather” itself: rainfall, sunshine, and the atmosphere. People asked: Can you, for instance, artificially flood your enemy’s territory? Can you cause heat and drought in your enemy’s territories? Apart from biological weapons, the prospect of weaponizing weather was being discussed. In that context, after the Second World War, the President of the United States began appointing a committee that reported to him every year on the state of the world’s atmosphere. This was partly to understand the effects of nuclear tests and radiation fallout, partly connected to space competition, and partly linked to this interest in making military weapons out of weather. Much of what we now call “the climate problem” or “planetary environmental problems” grew out of that early post-war interest in the state of the world’s atmosphere—both in America and in the Soviet Union.

Parallel to that was another history: the history of human development after decolonization. Take India. When India became independent, one of the most urgent tasks was feeding its people. The long period of British rule was marked by repeated famines, big and small. The first major problem

before the new government was: how do we feed people? This is why, quite early, Nehru was interested in research on high-yielding varieties of wheat. The Green Revolution happened later, during Mrs. Gandhi's time, but governmental interest existed earlier. Before artificial fertilizers became widespread, one major route to expanding food production was irrigation. That is why Nehru was interested in dams. Institutions like the Tennessee Valley Authority became models that Indian planners and officials discussed. Nehru is remembered as keeping a map of India in his office with the rivers marked, and noting which rivers had been dammed and which had not, because rivers were viewed as sources of electricity and irrigation water to grow more food. This logic was not unique to India. Nasser in Egypt also treated dams as vital. In Maharashtra, dam-building was pursued not only for irrigation but also for collecting rainwater so that water could be released during droughts. From the 1890s onward, India was widely described as a monsoon-dependent economy: if the monsoon was good, food supply would be better. One of the first major cases where increasing the size of a water dam contributed to an earthquake was Koyna in 1967.

Something happens in the 21st century as the idea of climate change, initially called global warming, becomes part of "everyday news" in the media that increasingly feature scientists explaining the phenomenon of anthropogenic global warming. Surprisingly, scientists of the "earth system" or what I call "the planet", aided by the gifted historian John McNeill, begin to talk about human history from the 1950s on, as they begin to call this period - after the title of Karl Polanyi's

great book “The Great Transformation” the period of “the Great Acceleration”.

From the 1950s onward, you begin to see humans becoming increasingly successful—especially in feeding larger populations. Human population expanded dramatically. If we think of *Homo sapiens* as a 300,000-year-old species, it took almost all those 300,000 years to reach one billion. In 1900, humans were about 1.6 billion. By 2000, we were about six billion—more than a fourfold increase in a century. Now we are about eight billion. Longevity also increased. Around 1945–1950, average lifespan globally was roughly 45–50 years. In the 18th century it was around 30 years. In ancient Greece it was around 20 years (including slaves). Public health measures improved, including in India, and antibiotics—penicillin was discovered in 1929—saved many lives, first dramatically among soldiers during the Second World War, and later in civilian life. As infections were controlled and maternal/infant mortality declined, longevity expanded. Today, average human lifespan is generally in the seventies globally, and in Indian cities it is not unusual to hear of people living into their late eighties and nineties. Even though many people remain poor and lack access to fresh water, two broad developments stood out: inequality has increased in recent decades, and at the same time, the global middle class has expanded. Another shift occurred: around 2000, most consumers were from OECD (developed) countries. Today, most consumers are outside the OECD: rising middle classes in China, India, Latin America, Africa, and elsewhere. Roughly, about 65% of consumers are now outside the OECD, with the rest in developed countries. If

environment were not an issue, this would sound like a strong story of human flourishing.

Some of the facts provided by other researchers are staggering. In 1985 there were 1 billion consumers of gadgets (1.6 billion humans in 1900); 21 years later were 2 billion consumers (2006); in 2015 we've 3 billion consumers; the next billion consumers are expected to join the club in the next 4- 6 years. So, the consumer classes are fast expanding. European and North American consumers were 75 % in 1986 and are 30 % now. New consumers are numerous, they need more protein, more vegetables, and their lifestyles are changing. This has an impact on the biosphere. The most populous "bird" on the planet is the broiler chicken. 21 billion broiler chickens to the bird that comes second in number, 1.5 billion. So, this gave us an idea, that non-human worlds and even something as big as the planet responds to what we do. One of the biggest issues discussed in this context is the question of the loss of biodiversity and there's been a serious scientific discussion about whether or not we are in the beginnings of a Sixth Great Extinction of life on the planet as a consequence of the Great Acceleration. A most important thing about such an extinction, were it to happen, would be that it would be the first time in the history of the planet that a biological species will have caused a great extinction of life. All the previous extinctions were caused by volcanic eruptions, asteroid strike and such like phenomena.

From the 1970s onward, there was increasing awareness of environmental impacts. In 1972, the Club of Rome report Limits to Growth argued that infinite growth is impossible

on a finite planet. Around the same period, Rachel Carson's *Silent Spring* highlighted how DDT—used widely, including in India, to kill malarial mosquitoes—was associated with cancer risks and ecological damage, including killing birds. This work contributed to DDT being banned or restricted in many places. At a simple level: when people gain economic stability, a common tendency is to consume more protein—more meat, and increasingly fish. But Earth does not naturally produce protein at the scale demanded by billions of people wanting high-protein diets. So, humans have industrialized plants first, then animals, then birds, and now fish. Fish that were once mostly wild-caught are now farmed extensively. A striking figure is that around 90% of farmed fish production is in Asia, with the largest share from China. This flourishing is also structurally dependent on electricity and modern technologies—hospitals, industrial furnaces, refrigeration, and cold chains. During COVID, vaccine distribution depended on refrigeration and cold transport. Yet refrigeration technologies contribute to warming and ecological stress. So flourishing is real, but it has costs.

Earth system scientists were thus also saying that humans' impact on the planet had become something like the impact of an asteroid strike. We are capable of changing the whole climate of the planet, thanks humans' numbers, institutions, technologies. Humans are, in other words, a geophysical force on the planet. I end this section then by suggesting to you then, that we now have two reigning visions of the human. We have the human whose history is separate from natural history, the human who pursues freedom assuming that natural history

was part of the givenness of the world. And we have this other understanding of the humans, a collectivity of humans, thanks to their technology numbers, the number of animals we keep to eat or farm, acting as a geophysical force. This is a mode of existence that's not available to us through our instruments of perception, but that we cognitively become aware of it through what the scientists are telling us. We become a planetary force changing the climate of the whole planet and causing biodiversity loss that could be catastrophic. Faced with this thought, I began to make a distinction in my own thinking between the globe and the planet to argue that while the globe is human-centric, human-made, and humans are its main protagonists, the planet is different, it is not made by humans and humans are not even central to its history, though humans are now a part of the earth system, a part that is breaking down the "system."

The energy that underwrote modern flourishing came largely from fossil fuels—first coal in the 19th century, and petroleum and gas in the 20th century. An important feature of human energy transitions is that new energy sources tend not to eliminate old ones; use accumulates. Shifts from wood to coal, coal to oil, and now to renewables have often meant "more and more and more" rather than replacement. In 1958, in a meeting of one of the U.S. presidential advisory committees, the scientist Roger Revelle remarked that humanity was effectively running a vast experiment by burning, in a couple of centuries, fossil fuels that took hundreds of millions of years to form. Parallel scientific discussions emerged from space research. In NASA-related debates (1960–1966) about why

Earth is habitable while Venus is too hot and Mars too cold, researchers focused on the atmosphere and “greenhouse gases.” These trace gases act like a blanket: too much leads to warming that can make life dangerous; too little leads to insufficient warming. Later, discovery of the ozone hole brought attention to the ozone layer’s protective role against harmful radiation. This is where “planetary” thinking gains force: humans are embedded in planetary systems and dependent on them.

For most of human history, societies had strong seasonal and planetary awareness. Astrology (Jyotish) is one example of a planetary consciousness—whether or not one believes in it. Agrarian societies lived by seasons. In Bengal, proverbial traditions like Khonar Bochon encode practical knowledge about what to do in which months—Poush, Agrahayan, Vaisakh, Ashadh, Shravan, and so on. Modern infrastructure and technology gradually turned seasons into something aesthetic and marginal, because we built all-weather roads, all-season transport, and refrigeration. You can now buy mangoes year-round (often imported), but that very capacity rests on energy-intensive systems that affect the planet.

I’ll point out quickly here how the the story of the planet, i.e. “the earth system”, = decenters humans and then go on to my conclusion.

Think of something as elementary to human life as air, something we take for granted, the atmosphere, we breathe. Now this atmosphere has one characteristic which allows us to exist, which is that the share of Oxygen (which is now

21 %) never goes up so high that forests all get burnt out and it never goes down so low, that animals – including us – choke to death. Now, who maintains the share of Oxygen in the atmosphere, something we so critically depend on? If you ask that question you will realize, on reading the literature, that humans play no role in maintaining Oxygen at that level. It is really forms of life humans consider “low”, like bacteria, viruses, planktons in the sea, trees and plants, they all play a role in maintaining oxygen at that level. The interesting thing about that is, that Oxygen is a very reactive gas. If you want to maintain the share of Oxygen at a particular level, you have to keep supplying the atmosphere with fresh oxygen and this fresh Oxygen is supplied by the so-called lower forms of life. When you ask for how long these lower forms of life been doing that for how long have, they maintained this so-called modern atmosphere of the planet the answer is – at least for 375 million years!

So, you can see that this atmosphere on which we critically depend was not made with us in view. We come so late in the story, that we are incidental to the atmosphere even though we depend on it for life. If global warming goes on for such an extent that the average oceanic temperature rises let's say by six degrees Celsius, then we will be killing off a lot of the planktons that produce the Oxygen. Thus, we now have the capacity now to shut off the supply of Oxygen, on which we critically depend. This is yet another aspect of the period of the Great Acceleration. Hence, I argue that the intensification of globalization, intensification and expansion of human economic and extractive activities all over the planet, has created a crisis for human beings, a planet-wide-crisis.

One of the best examples of this crisis is the current pandemic. Anthony Fauci, the main scientist advising the President in the United States on the pandemic wrote an essay, an academic article, in a biological journal called "Cell" in September 2020 that makes for a fascinating reading in the context of this discussion. Fauci argued that because of the expansion of the human activities, economic activities which results in the cutting down of forests and the loss of habitat for wildlife, humans were entering what he called an era of pandemics. Wildlife is being forced to come closer to us and bacteria and viruses that may have lived in the guts of wild animals for millions of years are switching hosts. In 75 % of the newly emerging infectious diseases have come from wild animals which is why they are called zoonotic diseases.

India is exposed to planetary environmental risks because of its long coastline and the Himalayas. A critical concern is that geopolitics has led India, China, and Pakistan to militarize the Himalayas heavily. This is not good for glacier health. The Himalayas feed multiple major rivers; many are glacier-fed. These river systems sustain countries across a wide belt of Asia. The more the Himalayas are subjected to intensive "development" and militarization, the more fragile the glaciers become. This leads to a difficult proposition: geopolitics must now take geology seriously. You may not be able to convert geology into politics, but you cannot ignore geology while pursuing geopolitics.

It seems increasingly likely that we will not "solve" climate change in the sense of eliminating its effects quickly; we will have to live with worsening conditions. That makes resilience

and adaptation crucial. The poorest are least responsible for emissions but most exposed. Coastal communities face salinity intrusion: freshwater turning saline. In parts of Kerala, coastal freshwater is reportedly becoming saline, forcing poor people to travel farther for water needed to cook. In the Sundarbans, salinity exposure has reportedly caused severe health problems among poor women in fishing communities, including fungal infections; predatory medical practices such as unnecessary hysterectomies have been reported in such contexts, which then reduce women's ability to do physical work. Planning must protect the most vulnerable. One model mentioned is Australia, where academics produced a book titled *Living Hot*, proposing that government create anticipatory plans for warming impacts in different regions and build resilience.

A key question raised is: why do Indian cities fail to manage pollution collectively, when pollution reduces lifespan and harms well-being? Instead, people privatize solutions—air purifiers, sealed apartments, expensive filtration—options only a privileged minority can afford. This does not protect the poor. A related reflection was shared: Partha Chatterjee's book *Towards a Just Republic* offers a vision of a more just India, but does not centrally address environment/pollution. The counter-question posed was: why should a vision of justice not include environmental harms that affect everyone? This becomes a diagnostic question about democracy: what can it deliver well (development demands like roads and electricity), and where is it failing (pollution control, collective environmental protection)? He argued that the

point where *vikas*/development and environmental activism meet is: thinking locally and thinking about the poor, invoking a Rawlsian principle—evaluate policy by whether it benefits the least advantaged. He pointed to a contemporary trend: thousands of high-net-worth individuals leaving India and China in recent years by buying foreign passports—a “personalized escape” available only to a privileged minority. Most people cannot escape; therefore, democracy must solve problems collectively.

To conclude, I leave you with two perspectives: One is the perspective we work when writing global histories, whether you do histories of modern empires or of global or world-capitalism. These are the histories in which the two philosophical assumptions of separation between human and non-human histories and the idea of freedom and emancipation as a goal of human history exist. On the other hand, when you look at humans from what I call a planetary perspective, not a global perspective, when you decenter the human, you realize that we are speaking the globe and the planet are two related but distinct – and may I emphasize, non-binary – entities. The intensification of globalization reveals to us these two perspectival points both in their relationship and difference. One distinction between the two categories the global and the planetary comes out when we think of sustainability. Sustainability is an extremely human-focused category and term. When you read earth system scientists’ thought on what makes the planet friendly to complex multicellular life for hundreds of millions of years, the category they think through is “habitability”, that completely de-centers the human for even

if there humans to think about it, the question of habitability would remain (for, say, some extra-terrestrial geologists). When we write or think about planetary history of humans, the history of complex multicellular life and what sustains that life becomes the most important thing and the questions arises as to whether or not the institutional forms and technologies through which we have pursued emancipation and freedom have actually produced the risk of endangering the life-support system of the planet as a whole.

The systems through which the planet supports life includes human life. So, it seems to me that we're living on the cusp of the global and the planetary. We have to look at human beings from two perspectives at once. There is the perspective of globalization which is really the perspective of that differentiates humans into class, gender, caste, sexuality, race, colonization. Those are properly global history and they are politicized and political histories as they ought to be and they're actually undergirded by you might say certain forms of political philosophy. And then there's the planetary perspective, which so out-scales and so decenters the human that it by raising the question of human existence, it brings into vision a politics that is the politics of survival.

Let me give you one example from the Australian firestorms of 2019-2020 of this politics of survival. It was during these fires that the government of South Australia decided to kill deliberately- or as the word goes, "cull" - ten thousand feral camels simply because the camels were competing with human beings in a particular part of Australia for water.

So, when you actually faced with the planetary event of destruction, like gigantic forest fires, a huge earthquake, huge firestorms like in California or in Australia, the planet reduces you to being a creature like just any other creature on the world and then you compete with other creatures for survival. The planet thus produces the politics of survival which is what why you would not want to push extractive global capitalism to the degree where it revealed the planetary. The planet or the "earth system" was not made with us in mind, whereas we think of "the earth," "the world," "the globe" – as human-oriented. Heidegger introduced the category "earth" in a 1936 lecture in Frankfurt as a philosophical category. He said the earth always greets us with its produce even human projects of worlding the earth was perennially marked by humans being in strife with the earth. Heidegger rejected the idea of "rocky planet" as being of no interest to philosophers while astronomers could be interested in it. One could take Heidegger's point that the globe, the earth and the world are human-centric conceptions, the planet is not, but it seems to me that humans have become planetary, and we now need to look at humans from both of these perspectives because they're both relevant.

This planetary turn represents a conundrum in human history. The climate and other connected contemporary forms of environmental crises raise this question: Can humans continuously modernize their world in search of various "freedoms" and avoid the dark prospect of making many parts of it uninhabitable? Would this require us to reframe our political thoughts?





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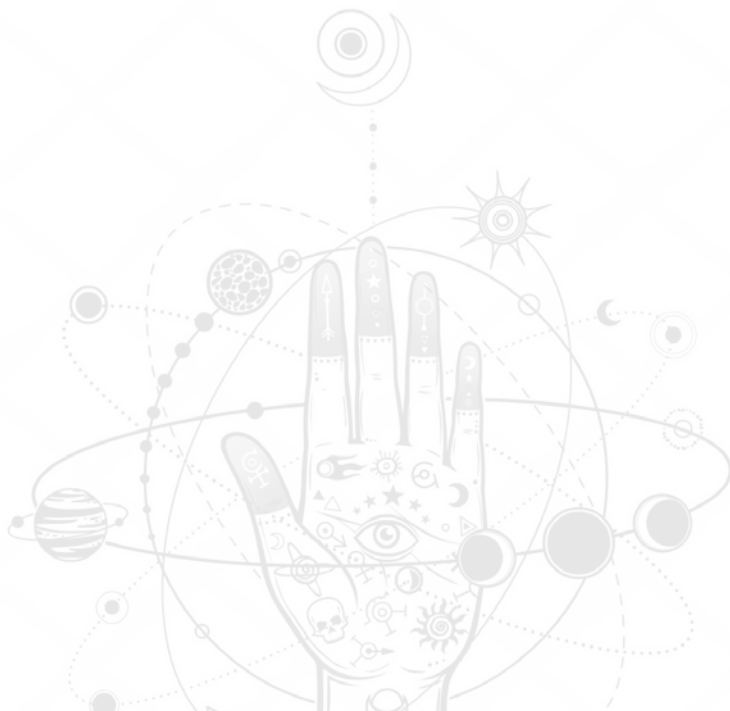


Dipesh Chakrabarty is the Lawrence A. Kimpton Distinguished Service Professor in the Departments of History and South Asian Languages and Civilizations, and in the College, at the University of Chicago. He is widely recognized as one of the foundational figures in Subaltern Studies and postcolonial thought, and has also served as a consulting editor of *Critical Inquiry* and on the editorial boards of major journals such as the *American Historical Review* and *Public Culture*.

His scholarship has reshaped several fields at once: modern South Asian history and historiography, postcolonial theory, comparative studies of modernity, and, more recently, the intellectual implications of anthropogenic climate change for historical thinking. What distinguishes Chakrabarty's work is its ability to move across scales without losing conceptual precision—from labor and empire to modernity, planetary crisis, and the limits of historical reason itself.

He is the author of a series of major works that have become indispensable to contemporary historical and the

oretical debate, including *Rethinking Working-Class History: Bengal 1890–1940*, *Provincializing Europe*, *Habitations of Modernity*, *The Calling of History*, *The Climate of History in a Planetary Age*, and *One Planet, Many Worlds: The Climate Parallax*. Across these writings, Chakrabarty has consistently compelled readers to rethink Europe, modernity, emancipation, and, increasingly, the place of the human within a larger planetary condition.





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