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The human condition in the Anthropocene: four chakrabartian parallaxes

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João Ribeiro Mendes
Departamento de Filosofia, Escola de Letras, Artes e Ciências Humanas, Universidade do Minho
Portugal
jcrmendes@elach.uminho.pt
ORCID: 0000-0003-3731-2246

Abstract
The Anthropocene signifies a pivotal epoch in which human activity has become the dominant force shaping the Earth`s geology and ecosystems. This shift necessitates a profound reevaluation of what it means to be human. This paper investigates the concept of the "human condition" within the framework of the Anthropocene, drawing upon the philosophical insights of Dipesh Chakrabarty. The paper is organized into two main parts. The first part delineates the meaning of "human condition," placing it within a broader philosophical and historical context. The second part examines how the Anthropocene has transformed our understanding of the human condition, altering traditional perspectives on human agency, temporality, and planetary impact. Through this analysis, fresh perspectives are provided on the existential and ethical dimensions of being human in an era marked by profound ecological transformation.

Keywords
Human condition, Anthropocene, Dipesh Chakrabarty, Parallax

Resumo
O Antropoceno marca uma era crucial em que a atividade humana se tornou a força predominante que molda a geologia e os ecossistemas da Terra. Essa mudança exige uma reavaliação profunda do que significa ser humano. Este trabalho investiga o conceito de "condição humana" no contexto do Antropoceno, fazendo uso das reflexões filosóficas de Dipesh Chakrabarty. O artigo está organizado em duas partes principais. A primeira delineia o significado de "condição humana", situando-o num contexto filosófico e histórico mais amplo. A segunda analisa como é que o Antropoceno transformou a nossa compreensão da condição humana, alterando as perspetivas tradicionais sobre a agência humana, a temporalidade e o impacto planetário. Através desta análise, são apresentadas novas perspetivas sobre as dimensões existenciais e éticas de ser humano numa era marcada por uma profunda transformação ecológica.

Palavras-chave
Condição humana, Antropoceno, Dipesh Chakrabarty, Paralaxe

The Anthropocene marks a profound turning point in human history – a time when human activity has emerged as a dominant force, shaping not only our environment but our very understanding of existence. This epoch calls us to reflect on what it means to be human in a world where the lines between nature and culture blur, and our actions intertwine with the planet`s geophysical processes. Here, the "human condition" transcends mere survival and technological progress, touching upon a shared responsibility for the future of

Earth itself. This responsibility, explored deeply in the works of scholars like Dipesh Chakrabarty, demands an interrogation of both our agency and limitations as agents within a fragile ecosystem.

Central to this reflection are the divergent perspectives of the sciences and humanities, each providing a lens through which to view humanity`s role in this new age. Geoscientists quantify and predict environmental impacts, while philosophers and historians ponder the existential weight of our unprecedented influence on the planet. The challenge lies in harmonizing these viewpoints, understanding that while each discipline offers invaluable insights, none alone can encapsulate the complexity of our current epoch. As Chakrabarty suggests, the Anthropocene`s disorientation need not be resolved but embraced, serving as a catalyst for new ways of thinking about human agency and ethical responsibility.

This exploration will be divided into two main parts. The first part defines the "human condition" within a broader philosophical and historical context, establishing a foundation for understanding the forces that shape human existence. The second part examines how the Anthropocene has reshaped this understanding, prompting shifts in concepts of agency, temporality, and planetary impact. Together, these perspectives shed light on the ethical and existential challenges that define humanity`s role in this unprecedented era of ecoclimatic transformations.

1. Defining the human condition

A swift way of understanding the concept of "human condition" is provided by the 1987 film *Der Himmel über Berlin* (Wings of Desire), directed by Wim Wenders, whose action takes place in that German city in a period before the fall of the infamous wall that divided it between 1961 and 1989 (Wenders, 1987).

The main character, named Damiel, is an angel consumed by a relentless desire to know what is to be human. He makes an irreversible decision to leave behind his angelic nature, opting to fully experience life as a human, i.e., to embrace the human condition.

As he enters it, he dips into the material world, encountering passions and actions. Here, he becomes aware of what finitude is, realizing his existence could cease at any moment. Entering this realm, he feels compelled to work for sustenance and to create something lasting beyond his death, driven by a longing for immortality, which, in his case, has faded. Engaging with others, he interacts, cooperates, and faces conflicts. Ultimately, entering this world demands that he make decisions and plan what to do with his existence.

This is, therefore, in a first approach, the meaning of the expression "human condition": it refers to our unique way of being in the world, as beings towards death, grappling with the challenges of survival, coexisting with others, while simultaneously embracing freedom and responsibility.

1.1. A philosophical category

The expression "human condition" is credited to Michel Eyquem de Montaigne (1533-1592) in his *Essays* (1580), where he wrote: "He who knows himself also knows others, for each man bears the entire form of the human condition" (Montaigne, 1993 [1580], III, 2).[1]

However, it only became a genuine category of philosophical thought with the existentialist thinkers. Jean-Paul Sartre, in particular, used it in the essay *L`existencialisme est un humanisme* (Existentialism is a Humanism) (1946) as an alternative to the notion of "human nature," which existentialists considered a harmful fiction. He stated in this regard:

> It is impossible to find in every man a universal essence that could be said to comprise human nature, there is nonetheless a universal human *condition***.** It is no accident that today`s thinkers are more likely to speak of the condition of man rather than of his nature. By "condition" they refer, more or less clearly, to all limitations that *a* priori define man`s fundamental situation in the universe. Historical situations vary: a man may be born a slave in a pagan society or a feudal lord or a member of the proletariat. What never varies is the necessity for him to be in the world, to work in it, to live out his life in it among others, and, eventually, to die in it. (Sartre, 2007 [1946]: 42).[2]

The French philosopher thus defines the human condition as the basic set of limitations, nearly invariant, for being human and by being human, namely those I have already mentioned: mundanity, mortality, productivity, sociality, and freedom.

1.2. Vital and existential dimensions of the human condition

The human condition, this unique way of being in the world, is, as commonly acknowledged, the main subject of inquiry of Philosophical Anthropology. Within this field, it is often explored through two fundamental dimensions. For example, the Spanish philosopher José Ortega y Gasset explored these dimensions in his work *Meditación de la Técnica* (Meditation on

[1] "Qui se connaît, connaît aussi les autres, car chaque homme porte la forme entière de l'humaine condition" (Montaigne, 1595).

[2] " (…) s'il est impossible de trouver en chaque homme une essence universelle qui serait la nature humaine, il existe pourtant une universalité humaine de condition. Ce n'est pas par hasard que les penseurs d'aujourd'hui parlent plus volontiers de la condition de l'homme que de sa nature. Par condition ils entendent avec plus ou moins de clarté l'ensemble des limites *a priori* qui esquissent sa situation fondamentale dans l'univers. Les situations historiques varient : l'homme peut naître esclave dans une société païenne ou seigneur féodal ou prolétaire. Ce qui ne varie pas, c'est la nécessité pour lui d'être dans le monde, d'y être au travail, d'y être au milieu d'autres et d'y être mortel" (Sartre, 1946; 67-68).

Technology) describing them as shaping us into a kind of "ontological centaur." In his own words:

> Apparently, human beings have the strange condition that, to some extent, aligns with nature, yet, in another aspect, does not, rendering them both natural and supernatural simultaneously, akin to an ontological centaur. While a portion of them is undoubtedly immersed in nature, the other part transcends it (Ortega y Gasset, J., 1964 [1939]: 338; my translation).[3]

The human condition thus has a vital dimension, which corresponds to the need we have to ensure basic biological functions (such as eating, sleeping, reproduction) for our survival, both as individuals and as a species, on Earth. And it has an existential dimension, which concerns the responsibility we have to project, individually and collectively, a meaningful existence in the world. Strictly speaking, it is the existential dimension, rooted in freedom and responsibility, that truly defines what it means to be human, enabling us to lead a life radically different from that of a worm, an orchid, or a piece of limestone.

In other words, this means that humans are biological agents subject to natural evolutionary processes, while also being cultural agents, architects of their own distinct history.

1.3. The third dimension: the human as a telluric force

Now, what the Anthropocene has brought is the introduction of a third dimension to the human condition. Indeed, beyond the effort to ensure survival and the task of projecting a meaningful existence, we now have to concern ourselves with controlling the power we have only recently gained to cause changes in the Earth System at all its scales, including the global scale. I refer to this additional dimension as the condition of telluric force.

This designation resonates with that given by the Italian priest and geologist, Antonio Stoppani, in his *Corso di Geologia* (1873), to the most recent geological era, which he termed "Era Antropozoica" (a precursor concept to the Anthropocene), where "[*human activity*] *is a new telluric force that, in potential and universality, can be compared to the greatest forces of the Earth*" (Stoppani, 1873: 732).[4]

As noted by the Indian historian Dipesh Chakrabarty, given the Anthropocene`s origins in geosciences, it is logical that it has been specifically associated with humanity possessing a force akin to major natural geological

[3] "Por lo visto, el ser del hombre tiene la extraña condición de que en parte resulta afín con la naturaleza, pero en otra parte no, que es a un tiempo natural y extranatural, una especie de centauro ontológico, que media porción de él está inmersa, desde luego, en la naturaleza, pero la otra parte trasciende de ella."

[4] "[*l'attività umana*] *è una nuova forza tellurica che in potenza e universalità può essere paragonata alle maggiori forze della terra*."

forces. However, he emphasizes that "force" is a morally neutral term, merely indicating "the physical pull that one material body exerts on another" (Chakrabarty, 2021 [2018]: 159). To fully comprehend its historical and existential significance, it must be translated into the category of "power," representing "a *conscious* geological force" (Chakrabarty, 2021 [2018]: 163), imbued with inherent intentionality and responsibility in its application.

2. Dipesh Chakrabarty's insights into a new Philosophical Anthropology.

2.1. The Anthropocene as a time of disorientation.

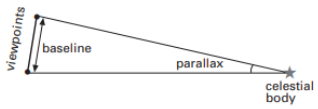
All this calls for a renewed focus on Philosophical Anthropology, particularly to address the intricate interplay between humanity and the Earth. Among contemporary scholars, few have delved as deeply into this subject as the aforementioned Indian historian Dipesh Chakrabarty, who has devoted significant effort to it, offering profound insights into the human condition in the Anthropocene. It is primarily his ideas that I will build upon for the rest of my article.

In his latest book, *One Planet, Many Worlds* (2023), Chakrabarty vividly portrays the Anthropocene as a time of disorientation, as evidenced by numerous references throughout the book (Chakrabarty, 2023: 15, 69, 71, 103). This disorientation is particularly evident, especially in how we feel, think, act, and imagine about climate change – the quintessential challenge of the Anthropocene epoch. Indeed, it appears that we are currently navigating a landscape marked by pervasive confusion, uncertainty, hesitancy, and a palpable sense of directionlessness.

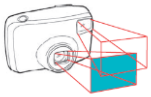
2.2. The parallax metaphor

Chakrabarty (2023) employs the concept of "parallax" figuratively in the title to shed light on the underlying causes of this disorientation.

As is well known, the term "parallax" is primarily used in astronomy and photography (see figure 1). It denotes an optical effect where an observed object seems to shift its position when the observer changes their viewpoint or when different observers view it from varying perspectives (Daintith & Gould, 2005: 342-343). In photography, this occurs because what is seen through the viewfinder of the camera differs from what is captured by its lens (Präkel, 2009: 183-184).



Source: Daintith & Gould (2005: 343)



Source: Präkel (2009: 184)

Figure 1: parallax effect

The parallax effect distorts our perception of the true position of the observed object, crucial for accuracy. Although attempts can be made to rectify or minimize this discrepancy, complete elimination remains unattainable.

Chakrabarty uses it metaphorically, implying that it represents an idea open to interpretation and understanding from various, possibly conflicting viewpoints.

However, it`s worth noting that the triadic structure present in the physical effect, involving observer(s), observed object, and background, shifts to interpreters, interpreted idea, and frames of reference (see figure 2).

Figure 2: real vs. metaphorical parallax effect (author`s own drawing)

This metaphorical use of the concept of parallax was first introduced by Slavoj Žižek in *The parallax view* (2006). In this essay, the Slovenian philosopher discusses a "parallax gap," which he defines as a "confrontation of two closely linked perspectives between which no neutral common ground is possible." (Žižek, 2006: 4).[5]

As Žižek himself points out, this implies both a deconstruction of Hegelian dialectics regarding the sublimation of differences and a return to Kantian logic

[5] Slavoj Žižek discusses several concepts involving "parallax." Beyond the "parallax view," which refers to how differing or seemingly opposing perspectives can emerge from the same underlying reality depending on the observer`s position, and the "parallax gap," which highlights the irreconcilable divide between these perspectives, Žižek also introduces the idea of a "parallax shift." This shift involves the subjective or theoretical move required to acknowledge and embrace the parallax gap. It occurs when one realizes that different perspectives are not just alternative views of the same reality, but rather, they reveal a deeper structural antagonism at the core of reality itself.

of antinomies. In simpler terms, recognizing the existence of the parallax gap compels us to acknowledge that, at best, we can only oscillate between these two (or more) perspectives because they cannot be reconciled or synthesized together.[6]

In a more recent work, Žižek illustrated his concept of parallax through the example of a flip-effect lenticular image, which reveals a simple animation or transformation when viewed from different angles.[7] With his signature provocative humor, Žižek referenced soft-porn postcards from the 1960s and '70s, featuring a model in a bikini. As he explained, "when one moved the postcard slightly or viewed it from a different angle, the bikini or dress would magically disappear, revealing the model's naked body" (Žižek, 2023).

In a more serious illustration, consider how politics may influence moral judgments and how ethics can influence political strategies. In a curious manner, they represent complementary aspects of the same issue, yet there is no overarching framework capable of fully elucidating both simultaneously.

However, both he and Chakrabarty seem to propose that rather than striving for a state of "reflexive equilibrium," where all tensions and contradictions are resolved, it is more intellectually fruitful to acknowledge and even embrace the gap that exists. This gap, which represents the divergence between different perspectives, is not something to be feared or avoided but rather something to be explored and understood. By confronting and engaging with this tension, individuals are prompted to critically reflect on their assumptions, beliefs, and biases, fostering a deeper understanding of complex issues and stimulating intellectual growth.

2.3. Four conceptual parallaxes

Four conceptual parallaxes – fundamental discrepancies or divergencies in perspectives leading to different interpretations or understandings – form, according to Chakrabarty, the foundational causes of the disorientation experienced since humans began acting as geological agents in the Anthropocene. Each conceptual parallax likely represents a different aspect of human interaction with the Earth`s systems, highlighting the complexity and multiplicity of perspectives inherent in understanding our role in shaping the planet`s future.

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[6] As noted by Ebbesen & Olsen (2023), Žižek has proposed the term *parallax* as an English characterization of Hegel`s concept of *Reflexion*. It has "a semantics which includes the simultaneous displacement and entanglement of the observer and the observed, and the term thus captures the contingent dynamics of subject and object, which is a key part of Hegel`s dialectics" (338).

[7] A flip effect lenticular image (flip or flicker image): displays a simple animation or transformation when viewed from different angles. In a flip effect lenticular image, two or more images are interlaced and printed on the lenticular lens material in such a way that when the image is viewed from one angle, one image is visible, and when it's viewed from another angle, a different image becomes visible.

This approach suggests that constructing a unified perspective of the human condition in the Anthropocene is incredibly challenging, if not unachievable. Instead, diverse groups such as scientists, policymakers, activists, corporations, and indigenous communities interpret the situation through their own unique lenses, influenced by their interests, values, and ideologies. These tensions are inherent in responses to the Anthropocene: conflicts between short-term economic interests (e.g., fossil fuel extraction) and long-term ecological sustainability; technological solutions to environmental problems (e.g., geoengineering) may pose risks and uncertainties that are perceived differently depending on one`s perspective; debates over responsibility and accountability for addressing the Anthropocene reveal divergent ideological positions regarding human-nature relationships and intergenerational justice; etc. And raises important ethical and political questions: How do we navigate conflicting perspectives and interests to address the global environmental crisis? What values and principles should guide our actions in the Anthropocene? How do power dynamics shape whose perspectives are privileged in decision-making processes related to environmental governance?

2.3.1. The Subject holding geological agency: Anthropos & Homo.

The proclamation of the Anthropocene by Paul Crutzen and Eugene Stoermer in 2000, declaring “We have become geological agents,” prompts a critical question: Who exactly is included in this “we”?

Some argue it refers to our species, the totality of past and present individual members belonging to the taxonomic biological category of *Homo sapiens*, the modern humans (e.g., Lewis & Maslin, 2015; Steffen, Broadgate, Deutsch, Gaffney & Ludwig, 2015). Some others claim it is Humanity, the entirety of human civilization, including its achievements, values, social structures, and cultural diversity (e.g., Haraway, 2025; Moore, 2017).

However, regardless of whether we consider ourselves as a species or as humanity, the “we” in this context doesn`t necessarily imply a unified, intentional entity. Instead, it seems to depict more of an aggregate – a collection of individuals whose actions, while not coordinated, collectively impact the Earth`s geological processes.

In essence, this “we” represents an abstract entity lacking centralized moral responsibility, as the consequences of human activity often arise from countless individual decisions and actions rather than collective intention.

The objection and criticism towards this interpretation stem from its failure to acknowledge the diverse historical moral responsibilities that exist within human civilization. By characterizing the “we” as either the human species or humanity as a whole, the interpretation overlooks the intricate web of individual and collective actions that have contributed to the Anthropocene.

In reality, historical moral responsibilities vary greatly among different groups and individuals, shaped by factors such as power dynamics, cultural contexts, and historical circumstances. Some argue that certain societies or individuals bear more responsibility for environmental degradation due to their disproportionate contributions to it, whether through industrialization, colonization, or other means. Ignoring these distinctions risks oversimplifying complex historical dynamics and absolving some parties of accountability.

We thus have two distinct yet complementary views on who or what constitutes the geological agent of the Anthropocene. This marks the first conceptual parallax. Both views contend and coexist, requiring us to navigate the tension between them.

Chakrabarty pondered the issue in his influential and extensively read and discussed 2009 article, "The Climate of History: Four Theses". There, he asserted:

> Who is the we? We humans never experience ourselves as a species. We can only intellectually comprehend or infer the existence of the human species but never experience it as such. There could be no phenomenology of us as a species. Even if we were to identify emotionally with a word like *mankind*, we would not know what being a species is, for in species history, humans are only an instance of the concept species as indeed would be any other life-form. But one never experiences being a concept. The concept dog, Althusser once famously said, drawing on Spinoza, does not bark! (Chakrabarty, 2021 [2009]: 43)

In the first of his two Tanner Lectures on Human Values at Yale University in 2015, Chakrabarty expanded on these ideas. He introduced a practical distinction between "Anthropos" and "Homo," arguing that this differentiation is crucial for understanding humanity`s role as a geological force in the Anthropocene. He asserted:

> (…) the crisis of climate change – or the period of the Anthropocene – marks a fundamental shift in the human condition. In order to do so, however, I need to develop two more distinctions (…) a pragmatic and artificial one (…) between the Latin *homo* and the Greek *anthropos* (Chakrabarty, 2016 [2015]: p. 147).

Chakrabarty noted that the term "Anthropos" has become prevalent, especially in the natural sciences, to describe humanity`s impact on climate change without assigning moral blame. It positions humans as the primary agents of significant climate changes throughout history. The concept of Anthropos emphasizes a factual acknowledgment of human involvement in climate change, highlighting the cause-and-effect relationship between human actions and environmental outcomes. As he succinctly puts it, it serves as "a causal term that does not imply any moral culpability" (Chakrabarty, 2016 [2015]: 157).

However, as emphasized by scholars in the field of humanities, it is overly simplistic to approach the climate crisis from such a restricted viewpoint, as it also prompts moral inquiries, such as who should assume responsibility for greenhouse gas emissions or who should bear the expenses of mitigation and adaptation.

Chakrabarty contends that it is at this point where "the figure of humanity differentiates itself from the `Anthropos´ (of the Anthropocene, say)" (Chakrabarty, 2016 [2015]: 159). This depiction of humanity, inherently political, appears somewhat paradoxical. On one hand, "it is an entity that is capable of projecting itself into the future as a purposeful agency even though the purpose may not always be one that wins universal approval" (Chakrabarty, 2016 [2015]: 159). Yet, simultaneously, it is an entity "always already divided by issues that in turn give rise to issues of justice," and "its unity as a political actor always `to come`" (Chakrabarty, 2016 [2015]: 159).

Furthermore, Chakrabarty asserts that the concept of "humanity" can be viewed as a product of globalization – a modern construct emerging from the intricate interactions of technological and economic networks that have transformed our planet into the familiar global environment we recognize today. He justifies this perspective by stating that the term "Homo" serves to denote "this figure of one-but-divided humanity" in contrast to the Greek "Anthropos," which has already been appropriated by scientists (Chakrabarty, 2016 [2015]: 159).

In this context, "Homo" carries connotations of moral responsibility and accountability in discussions about anthropogenic climate change. It emphasizes humanity`s connection to capitalist globalization, highlighting how climate change exacerbates existing inequalities among people and reflects socioeconomic disparities. By using "Homo," Chakrabarty underscores the socioeconomic and political dimensions of climate change, particularly within the frameworks of globalization and technological advancement. This term invites a critical examination of the ethical implications of human actions on the environment, urging a conversation about who is responsible for addressing the challenges posed by climate change.

In sum, the "we" of the Anthropocene can be conceptualized in two irreducibly complementary ways: as Anthropos, embodying the human species as an unintentional force, and as Homo, representing humanity as a moral agent. These are not unified entities, but rather perspectives that reflect individuals whose collective actions significantly influence Earth's processes.

2.3.2. The sense of Time: Natural History & Human History.

The second conceptual parallax has to do with two other distinct yet complementary views on the meaning of History.

One, that of the geoscientists, constitutes itself as a narrative about patterns and processes in nature that have created conditions for the emergence and persistence of life on our planet and, ultimately, for the appearance and continuity of human life within it. This is a Natural History that involves vast temporal scales on the order of millions or billions of years and references a past in which humans did not exist.

The other, that of historians, constitutes itself as a narrative about human emancipation from the dictates of nature to freely construct, based on their needs and interests, social and political projects. This is a Human History that involves smaller temporal scales, in the case of professional historians, of decades, centuries, or millennia.

Human History and Natural History were traditionally separate, according to Chakrabarty. However, in his aforementioned 2009 article, "The Climate of History: Four Theses," he argued that once geologists posited that we, as human beings, have become a geomorphological agent, possibly the largest of all, that distinction collapsed, or, in his own words "(…) anthropogenic explanations of climate change spell the collapse of the age-old humanist distinction – prevalent in the seventeenth century but dominant really in the nineteenth (…)" (Chakrabarty, 2021 [2009]: 26).

Here`s the problem we`re facing: we can`t give up on building our own History, but we also can`t ignore that we`ve become key players in shaping the course of Natural History.

This is a new situation. Not in the sense that we weren`t aware before that events in Natural History could impact Human History – just think of major natural disasters like earthquakes or volcanic eruptions. It`s new because in the Anthropocene, we have the power to change the patterns and processes of the Earth System at all scales, including globally, influencing its evolutionary path. Consequently, the Earth System has become more unstable and unpredictable, endangering our aspirations for freedom and progress.

It has become clear that the human condition in the Anthropocene is no longer that of the modern era, which took for granted the existence of natural resources to support human freedom projects or, as Chakrabarty puts it, "stands on an ever-expanding foundation of fossil-fuel use" (Chakrabarty, 2021 [2009]: 32), or more generally, one in which Natural History unfolded as a sort of silent and passive background supporting Human History.

One of the greatest challenges in bridging the perspectives of geoscientists and historians, of Natural History and Human History, lies in the experience of temporality. On one hand, it`s difficult to reconcile the various time scales that geoscientists and professional historians work with. But it`s even more challenging for ordinary individuals to grasp the vast temporal scales they deal with. In this case, the inability to comprehend these scales implies a lack of awareness, leading to a diminished motivation for action. Chakrabarty illustrates

this rare occurrence with the analogy of how an Indian person`s understanding of their own past expands when they are diagnosed with diabetes. Initially, he says, you may have a personal understanding of your family history, spanning a few generations. However, the diagnosis reveals new, impersonal, and long-term historical factors, such as genetic predisposition and lifestyle habits over thousands of years. While you may not have directly experienced these longer histories, the diagnosis brings a sudden awareness of them (Chakrabarty, 2021a: 15).

This disorientation regarding the meaning of our historical time extends beyond the past; it also pertains to the future. In the introductory section of Chakrabarty (2021 [2009]), the author revisits a thought experiment proposed by Alan Weisman in his book *The World Without Us* (2007). It revolves around imagining the complete extinction of the human species in the near future and the subsequent continuation of Earth and the Universe without us.

For Chakrabarty, contemplating this possibility, increasingly probable due to the current climate crisis, triggers a profound shift in our understanding of History. Specifically, it undermines our sense of History – the perception that there is a temporal continuity in human experience, progressing from the past through the present to the future. Indeed, if we entertain the idea of erasing the future, both the present and the past lose significance. Ultimately, the sense of History is annihilated.

2.3.3. The sense of Space: Global & Planetary.

In the aforementioned book *One Planet, Many Worlds* (2023), which Chakrabarty regards as complementary to *The Climate of History in a Planetary Age* (2021), he asserts that the third conceptual parallax entails considering two distinct yet overlapping ways of thinking our relationship with the place we inhabit. In this regard, he states:

> I found the globe/planet distinction useful in that it provided two different but related vantage points – the globe and the planet – from which to develop, simultaneously, two different perspectives on human history. We need to work with both of these in writing humanist histories for our age. Humans are and will remain divided on the question of how to relate to what I have called the planet. But in the age of anthropogenic climate change, the planet has emerged as an inescapable or unavoidable matter of concern (Chakrabarty, 2023: 4).

Just as with the Anthropos vs. Homo distinction, the “Globe” vs. “Planet” differentiation, is also regarded as possessing a pragmatic nature. In other words, Chakrabarty proposes it to clarify how our relationship with the place we inhabit has changed in the Anthropocene.

He began to conceive of this distinction when, as he puts it, “stumbled on the realization that the concept of *globe* in the word *globalization* was not the

same as the concept of *globe* in the expression *global warming*. Same word but their referents were different" (Chakrabarty, 2023a: 18; Chakrabarty, 2021 [2019]: 71).

In essence, he came to realize that theorists of globalization, particularly social scientists, and geoscientists, hold fundamentally divergent views on our planet. The former perceive it as an existential realm shaped by and for humanity – an intricate network of technologically mediated economic, social, and political exchanges and interconnections – while the latter view it as a complex system of interwoven biogeochemical processes.

As both are conceptual constructs, he found it preferable to use the term "Globe" to refer to the entity envisioned by globalization theorists and "Planet" to refer to the entity envisioned by Earth System scientists.

They represent the core concepts of two distinct ways of thinking about the Earth, which can precisely be termed global thinking and planetary thinking.

Chakrabarty pinpointed six contrasting aspects between these two perspectives.

Firstly, the Globe, shaped by human endeavors such as empires, capitalism, and technological advancements, places humans at the forefront of its narrative. Conversely, the Planet concept, while acknowledging human influence, shifts the focus away from human centrality. It prompts us to consider that Earth would have thrived for eons, even without human intervention.

"The globe," he states, "is a humanocentric construction; the planet, or the Earth system, decenters the human" (Chrakrabarty, 2021a: 4).

Global thinking often views the world primarily through the lens of human interests, often prioritizing economic growth, human welfare, and technological advancements. It tends to see Earth as a mere resource to be exploited for human benefit, often leading to environmental degradation and social inequalities.

In contrast, planetary thinking represents a paradigm shift towards a more planet-centric worldview. It recognizes the Earth as an interconnected system where human beings are just one part of a larger, complex web of life. It recognizes Earth as a complex, interconnected system where humans are just one part of a larger web of life. Planetary thinking emphasizes the interconnectedness and interdependence of all living organisms and stresses the importance of sustainable practices that consider the well-being of the entire planet, not just human interests.[8]

[8] One might argue that there is more than the biosphere to be considered. However, I believe that our current aim is to maintain the stability of the biosphere. We have learned from the previous five major extinctions that the planet lacks moral sensibility. We can extend the same concern to the ongoing sixth extinction. The ecological dimension takes priority. In their excellent book, Clark and Szerzynski (2021) address the crucial question in Chapter 2, "Who speaks through the Earth?" and argue that social thinkers have a significant role in addressing Anthropocene issues. However, at the end of the day, the solutions to major Anthropocene problems must be provided by natural scientists and engineers.

Secondly, global thinking, as described by Chakrabarty, "refers to matters that happen within human horizons of time – the multiple horizons of existential, intergenerational, and historical time – though the processes might involve planetary scales of space" (Chakrabarty, 2021 [2019]: 86), meaning it primarily focuses on events from the past 500 years.

Meanwhile, planetary thinking considers Earth`s evolution over billions of years, revealing the interconnectedness of its natural processes and ecosystems. This broader perspective profoundly influences our understanding of history, as Chakrabarty noted in 2009, especially in the context of the Anthropocene, which encourages longer-term views. Today, natural historians frequently connect current environmental disruptions to enduring patterns spanning millions or billions of years, broadening our perception of time and exposing us to the vastness of deep time (Chakrabarty, 2021 [2019]: 86). In planetary thinking, these different historicities – of individuals, societies, civilizations, and the Earth (and life within it) – can no longer be assumed as separate, but instead need to be integrated. Achieving this integration requires close collaboration between the natural sciences and the humanities, a collaboration that has yet to be fully realized.

Thirdly, while global thinking grapples with the challenge of sustainability primarily focused on human well-being and the Earth`s viability for future generations, planetary thinking confronts a broader issue known as the habitability problem. This problem, as described by Chakrabarty, is not solely centered on humans but encompasses the sustainability of complex, multicellular life in general (Chakrabarty, 2021 [2019]: 83). Unlike sustainability concerns, which predominantly revolve around human interests, the habitability problem encompasses the ability of an environment to support various life forms, including humans, as part of a larger ecosystem. The planetary mode of thinking, says Chakrabarty, "asks questions of habitability, and habitability refers to some of the key conditions enabling the existence for various life-forms including *Homo sapiens*" (Chakrabarty, 2021 [2019]: 87).

The relationship between these two issues is evident: sustainability conditions habitability. The degree, intensity, and pace of global resource exploration and extraction, coupled with the resulting negative externalities and slow natural resource renewal and recycling, have intertwined the challenges of sustainability and habitability. This interconnectedness is emphasized by Chakrabarty's assertion:

> the humanocentric idea of sustainability will have to speak to the planet-centric idea of habitability. For if my proposition that the intensification of the global has made us encounter the planet is true, then the age of the *purely* global that European empires and capitalism created and that theorists have pondered and historians documented and analyzed since the 1990s is now over. We live on the cusp of the global and the planetary (Chrakrabarty, 2021b: 204).

Devising solutions to these two intertwined problems entails reforming current political and economic institutions, all designed on human-centered assumptions, and ultimately reimagining politics itself in a fresh new philosophical understanding of the human experience. As Chakrabarty suggests, "We increasingly see how hopelessly humanocentric all our political and economic institutions still are. The political eventually will have to be refounded on a new philosophical understanding of the human condition" (Chrakrabarty, 2021b: 196).

Fourthly, whereas global histories often highlight human achievements and dominance, a closer examination of the planet`s geobiological history unveils a different narrative. In this broader perspective, human existence appears as merely a small fraction compared to the vast and diverse array of microbial life forms that have inhabited Earth for billions of years. This realization challenges us to acknowledge and appreciate the rich tapestry of life on our planet beyond the confines of our own species. It prompts us to recognize the profound interconnectedness of all living organisms and the pivotal role that microbial life has played, and continues to play, in shaping the Earth`s ecosystems and environments. Embracing this perspective invites a deeper understanding of our place within the intricate web of life and underscores the importance of preserving biodiversity and ecological balance for the well-being of all life forms, including humans.

Fifthly, terms like "the Globe," "the Earth," and "the World" evoke a sense of kinship between humans and their environment, presenting Earth as the home of humanity. However, the concept of the Planet challenges this anthropocentric viewpoint by emphasizing that Earth`s processes operate autonomously, regardless of human influence.

This disparity in perspectives also extends to the interpretation of our relationship with the planet: social scientists perceive it as a mutual dependence, while geoscientists characterize it as "something that is the condition of human existence and yet remains profoundly indifferent to that existence" (Chakrabarty, D. (2021 [2019]: 70).

According to Christophe Bonneuil, this "implies an encounter, without a will to power, with a 'radical otherness'" (Bonneuil, 2023: 2, my translation).[9] However, it is precisely this perspective that we struggle to relinquish in our prevalent global thinking – the belief in our complete dominance and control over the planet, spanning terrestrial, maritime, and aerial domains. In essence, this corresponds to a reform of the project of Modernity and renouncing our attempts to become, as Descartes aptly put it in his *Discours de la méthode*, "the masters and possessors of nature" (Descartes, 1966 [2019]: 168, my translation).[10]

[9] "…implique une rencontre, sans volonté de puissance, avec une 'altérité radicale'".
[10] "…maîtres et possesseurs de la nature".

Lastly, the Globe concept raises questions about fairness and norms, while planetary forces highlight our vulnerability as Earth`s inhabitants. This dichotomy shifts our focus from moral debates to survival instincts during natural disasters, challenging traditional political ideas. Global thinking is driven by values aimed at shaping global existence, forming the basis for geopolitical governance. Bonneuil further elaborates that "since life has inhabited our planet in various forms, no pristine state of nature, or past geological period, can be seen as a reference state to be restored" (Bonneuil, 2023: 2, my translation).[11]

The table 1 below illustrates the contrasting features of two modes of thinking: global thinking, which is currently in decline, and emerging planetary thinking, as conceptualized by Chakrabarty.[12]

Modes of thinking → / Aspects ↓	Globe-Global	Planet-Planetary
Human centrality	Human-centric, shaped by human endeavors such as empires, capitalism, and technology	Decenters the human, acknowledging human influence but shifting focus away from human centrality
Temporal focus	Focuses on events within human horizons of time (last 500 years)	Considers Earth`s evolution over billions of years, integrating different historicities (individual, societal, civilizational, and Earth)
Sustainability vs. Habitability	Primarily concerned with sustainability for human well-being and future generations	Addresses the broader issue of habitability for various life forms, emphasizing the interconnectedness of sustainability and habitability
Historical narrative	Highlights human achievements and dominance	Emphasizes the rich tapestry of life beyond humans, acknowledging the importance of microbial life and biodiversity
Kinship with environment	Sees Earth as the home of humanity, evoking a sense of kinship	Challenges anthropocentric views, stressing Earth`s autonomous processes and the indifference of the planet to human existence
Values and governance	Driven by values shaping global existence and geopolitical governance	Highlights vulnerability during natural disasters, shifting focus from moral debates to survival instincts, and questioning traditional political ideas

Table 1. Global Thinking vs Planetary Thinking: Dipesh Chakrabarty's conception

To conclude this section, I`d like to highlight two assertions by Chakrabarty regarding the interplay between the two modes of thinking and our connection to the environment we inhabit.

The first claim is that the globalization revealed the planetary, suggesting that we are not witnessing the conclusion of the capitalist globalization project, but rather "the arrival of a point in history where the global[ization] *discloses* to humans the domain of the planetary" (Chakrabarty, 2021 [2019]: 80). In simpler

[11] "…puisque les formes d'habitation de notre planète par la vie ont été multiples, aucun état de nature virginale, aucun état géologique passé (qu'il s'agisse de l'Holocène, du Paléozoïque, etc.), ne peut être désigné comme un état de référence à retrouver".
[12] See also Mendes (2023).

terms, "[t]he global[ization] discloses the planetary" (Chakrabarty, 2021c: 207). In this sense, according to him, the planet, seen as an idiosyncratic entity capable of becoming disruptive and threatening to all our vital and existential projects, has always remained latent, yet unexplored in this regard, or has never been fully incorporated into the realm of humanistic thought.

The second claim is that we are all living now at the cusp between the global and the planetary (Chakrabarty, 2021c: 207), i.e., that "[t]he age of the global as such is ending. Yet the quotidian is about both invoking the planetary and losing sight of it the next moment" (Chakrabarty, 2021 [2019]: 85). According to him, the global was the culmination of a historical process that began in the fifteenth century "that includes European expansion and the development of a technology that can make the sphere we live on into a globe for us" (Chakrabarty, 2021c: 207). The planetary, on the other hand, began in the beginning of the 20th century with the Haber-Bosch process of artificial nitrogen fixation in the biosphere, the main disruptor of the natural biogeochemical cycle of nitrogen.

By considering both of these assertions together, we can infer that Chakrabarty portrays the present era as liminal. This depiction suggests we find ourselves in a transitional space-time, existing between the global(ization) and the planetary. This transitional period acts as a bridge, linking the conclusion of one epoch to the emergence of another.[13]

Chakrabarty's assertion is that the Anthropocene signifies a transitional phase from the Global(ization) to the Planetary. More specifically, it is a time when these two realms are intricately intertwined in a relationship characterized by mutual endangerment.

This transition is occurring because Globalization (and the Anthropocene) does not signify the fulfillment of the project of Modernity as an emancipatory civilizational process. Instead, it is an unintended and unforeseen circumstance that has surpassed its intended objectives, or as French sociologist Jean Baudrillard would describe it, has become hypertelic[14]. It results from a "fatal strategy"[15] (not a trivial strategy), a strategy that was successful up to a certain moment and to a certain extent, but later generated an unplanned and undesired excess (Baudrillard 1983: 30).

2.3.4. The geopolitical action: One planet (Earth System) vs. Many Worlds.

The fourth conceptual parallax, in a certain sense, emerges as a corollary of the preceding one. It pertains to the distinct and complementary perspectives of geoscientists and social and human scientists regarding our planet. These

[13] The use of the term "cusp" aligns with the notion of "liminal," indicating a point of transition between two distinct states or the dividing line between two significantly different elements. For instance, when we refer to being "on the cusp of adulthood," it signifies the phase of moving from youth to adulthood.
[14] Hypertélique.
[15] Stratégie fatale.

differing viewpoints not only shape our understanding but also influence the diverse approaches taken in addressing it.

For the former, our planet is perceived as a complex and dynamic entity, comprised of interconnected biogeochemical systems. These systems include the atmosphere, hydrosphere, lithosphere, and biosphere, which interact in intricate ways to sustain life on Earth. Despite the diversity and complexity of these systems, there is a recognition of the underlying unity and interconnectedness of the planet as a whole. This perspective emphasizes the holistic understanding of Earth as a single, integrated system, where changes in one component can have far-reaching effects on the entire system. As Chakrabarty summarizes, "there is one atmosphere and one planet, a planetary climate system that can be treated as a whole and a single Earth system supporting life" (Chakrabarty, 2023: 7), "*the planet is differentiated and yet one*" (Chakrabarty, 2023: 8).

For the latter group, the perception of our planet differs significantly. It is seen as composed of multiple worlds, reflecting the idea that humans are "*only* differentiated, i.e., not-one, politically speaking" (Chakrabarty, 2023: 8). This perspective emphasizes the diverse cultural, social, and political landscapes that exist across the globe. Each "world" represents a distinct socio-political context shaped by historical, geographical, and ideological factors. In contrast to the unified view of the planet held by geoscientists, this perspective highlights the fragmentation and multiplicity inherent in human societies. It underscores the notion that while Earth may be a singular physical entity, the human experience of it is characterized by plurality and diversity.

"This structural and unresolvable mismatch between the oneness of the Earth system as imagined by the science of climate change and the pluriversal quality of human politics", notes Chakrabarty, "defines a fundamental aspect of the human condition today" (Chakrabarty, 2023: 10).

He refers to it as "the One and the Many" problem, the one that makes climate change such a difficult issue to tackle, perhaps even "a multidimensional, wicked problem that, given the plurality of human interests intrinsic to human history, is not practically amenable to solutions that seem overwhelmingly total: overthrow capitalism or discard modernity" (Chakrabarty, 2023: 105).

Geoscientists propose the concept of a singular Earth System, emphasizing its unified nature. Nonetheless, there exists no corresponding unified "humanity" that can be held responsible for causing global warming or effectively collaborate as a cohesive entity to mitigate it. This mismatch, as noted by Chakrabarty, exacerbates the sense of disorientation in the contemporary age (Chakrabarty, 2023: 15).

These two perspectives may initially appear irreconcilable, yet they must find common ground to effectively address anthropogenic geoclimatic changes. These changes transcend borders, necessitating global-scale solutions within

the framework of the Earth System. Simply relying on scientific or technocratic approaches won`t suffice; these challenges possess a profound political dimension. However, the inherently diverse and discordant nature of politics impedes coordinated or unified action. This encapsulates the essence of the "One and the Many" problem, which essentially underscores the fragmented nature of humanity`s response (Chakrabarty, 2023: 78).

2.4. The epistemic (framework) parallax: Sciences vs. Humanities

The epistemic parallax between the sciences and humanities reveals the intricate interplay of perspectives vital for understanding the human experience. This concept, which encapsulates the convergence of four distinct conceptual parallaxes, symbolizes the transformative shift in viewpoint that occurs when we analyze human existence through various knowledge frameworks. Initially articulated by C.P. Snow in *The Two Cultures* (1959), this idea critically examines the methodological and paradigmatic divide between the sciences and humanities. Further insights are offered in E.O. Wilson's *Consilience: The Unity of Knowledge* (1998) and Jerome Kagan's *The Three Cultures* (2009), both of which explore the implications of this epistemic divergence for our comprehension of the human condition.

Chakrabarty`s insights highlight the deep-rooted differences in approaches among geoscientists, historians, and scholars across the sciences and humanities. While each discipline offers valuable perspectives on the emerging anthropocenic condition, their methodologies and frameworks often resist alignment. Bridging these disciplinary divides is essential to addressing the profound challenges posed by the Anthropocene, especially the urgent need to adapt to this new human condition. This adaptation requires a unified, interdisciplinary approach capable of confronting the complex and accelerating changes in our world.

Conclusion

The Anthropocene forces a radical philosophical reconsideration of what it means to be human in a world where our species has become a geophysical force. As we confront this new epoch, the boundaries between nature and culture, human history and planetary history, blur in ways that challenge long-held assumptions about human agency, autonomy, and ethical responsibility. Drawing from Dipesh Chakrabarty`s reflections, the Anthropocene exposes the limitations of traditional humanism, which conceived of humanity as distinct from or above nature, free to shape its destiny without concern for the broader ecological consequences.

In this new era, humanity must reckon with its dual role as both biological agents embedded within natural processes and as conscious actors capable of altering planetary systems. This expanded view of the human condition

introduces new ethical demands: we are now responsible not only for shaping social and political systems but for the very geophysical future of the planet itself. The Anthropocene calls into question the temporal and spatial scales of human action, compelling us to think beyond the immediacy of historical events and embrace the deep timescales of planetary existence.

Philosophically, this epoch reveals the inadequacy of a purely anthropocentric worldview. Instead, we are confronted with the unsettling realization that human freedom and progress are contingent on planetary stability – an intricate web of interdependencies that both empowers and constrains us. The human condition in the Anthropocene, therefore, is characterized by a fundamental tension between our aspirations for agency and autonomy, and the recognition that our existence is enmeshed within the fragile and complex dynamics of Earth's systems.

This moment of disorientation, as Chakrabarty suggests, should not be viewed as a crisis to overcome but as an opportunity to deepen our understanding of what it means to be human. By embracing the paradoxes and parallaxes inherent in this era, we can begin to formulate new philosophical frameworks that account for the intricate interplay between human life and the planet. The Anthropocene demands a humility that acknowledges both the power and the fragility of human existence, reminding us that the future of humanity is inseparable from the future of the Earth itself.

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