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Dipesh Chakrabarty

The Climate of History in a Planetary Age

Chicago, IL: The University of Chicago Press, 2021

ISBN-13: 978-0-226-73286-2 (Paper) \$25.00; 978-0-226-10050-0 (HB) \$95.00; 978-0-226-73305-0 (e-book) \$24.99. 284 pp

Dipesh Chakrabarty's *The Climate of History in a Planetary Age* is a highly important book addressing the challenge of the climate change for historical studies. According to him, historians can no longer dismiss material realities and non-human world as the climate change has irrefutably demonstrated how human history is conjoined to the history of the planet Earth. Drawing inspiration from many prominent thinkers, including but not limiting to Hannah Arendt, Carl Schmitt, Bruno Latour and Jan Zalasiewicz, Chakrabarty presents a strong and well-founded opinion on the current direction of the discipline of history. The book is divided into three parts consisting of eight essays and a postscript. The essays are concise but, at the same time, informative. The postscript is written in the form of dialogue between Chakrabarty and Bruno Latour summing up the themes discussed in the essays. The structure of the book is practical for its reflective theme and the essays are well bound together.

In part one, *The Globe and the Planet*, Chakrabarty lays the problem on the table. The major argument Chakrabarty makes is that the word 'global' in 'global warming' and 'globalisation' does not point to the same thing. The globe in globalisation is human centred. It is the history of how humans created the sense of the globe through exploration and technology; how the Earth was shrunk to an inward-looking web of relationships between humans and their institutions. Globe in global warming, instead, marks the wholeness of the planet (pp. 71–78). It does not exclude anything on Earth and human is only one species among countless others.

In the long course of the historical studies however, the history of the Earth and the recent human history, which, according to Chakrabarty many call the capitalism, are addressed separately (pp. 49–51). This leads Chakrabarty to ponder the different temporalities merging in the problem of climate change and how this affects the framing of it. Carbon can cycle in the Earth-system for hundreds of thousands of years having complex consequences to the climate and to life on Earth. For the everyday politics in human scale, these kinds of slow and long processes are irrelevant, even though the climate change is (quite evidently) anthropogenic and affects everybody and everything through the same planetary systems. However, observes Chakrabarty, our political institutions and historical understanding of them is very human centred. Climate change is mostly addressed through the issue of sustainability and the limited resources on the planet, that is, as a problem of human inequality. According to Chakrabarty, it is important to notice how the limited-resources -discourse is deeply human centred perspective towards the world; it puts human concerns first (pp. 81–82).

Understanding the climate change only as a problem of human inequality very effectively reduces everything non-human out of the issue even though human as a species represents only a fraction of the life forms on the planet. In part two, *The Difficulty of Being Modern*, Chakrabarty proposes that the long history of the planet and multicellular life on it, and the much recent history of humans and capitalism must be brought together to understand the complexity of the whole issue. Even though non-human agency and human's role as an only possible historical agent have been long debated among environmental historians, not many

have delved as deep as Chakrabarty does. Chakrabarty pursues to show how concretely our daily lives and well-being is closely bound to the non-human world and the grand scale processes of the Earth-system. He asserts that while we cannot dismiss the questions of human flourishing and justice between humans in this time of human induced global warming, reducing the connection between human bodies to the non-human elements of the Earth may condemn the whole object of human flourishing into failure (p. 117). We cannot reduce ourselves only to bodies of stardust nor to great minds as we have already tangled our politics to the grand scale geological processes. Thus, argues Chakrabarty, human history comes entangled also to the natural history of the Earth, which is why human centred history of globalisation falls short in understanding climate-change in all its complexity.

In part three, *Facing the Planetary*, which is a witty reference to a William Connolly's book of the same name from 2017, Chakrabarty tries to find ways to understand the disproportional timescales of global human history and the long, deep history of the Earth. He observes that the suggested new geological epoch, the Anthropocene, with all its problems, might be suitable concept to make sense of the issue. According to him, there is: "...a constant conceptual traffic between earth history and world history", when Anthropocene is debated (p. 155). Chakrabarty points that Anthropocene is not only a measurement for geological time, but also, and originally, a measure for the extent of human impact on the Earth. Thus, the concept falls somewhere in between of natural sciences and humanities (pp 155–156). Even though there are several unsettled questions regarding the Anthropocene (when it started? what started it? should not it be called Capitalocene? and so on) it manages to bring earth-scientists and humanists together. In this, claims Chakrabarty, lies the explanatory value of the concept. Anthropocene is somewhat widely used and bears today features of a "buzzword" as if it explains well contours of the present climate crisis. Chakrabarty avoids this kind of hype and skilfully analyses the concept making it easier to grasp.

The book is elegantly argued and plural in its views. Chakrabarty does not try to prove himself right or others wrong, which is much welcomed approach in this time of black-and-white positions and heated debates in media as well as in academia over the climate change, Anthropocene and human inequality. What is more, the clarity of the text helps to underscore the importance of the argument. Chakrabarty has a remarkable ability to write clearly on complex issues such as the above-mentioned Anthropocene or, for instance, non-human agency. This makes the book easily accessible for wide audience from different fields of research and for researchers as well as students on different levels, but also to the larger public interested in the role of climate-change, the Anthropocene and the Earth in history. Reading the book was not only a very instructive experience; it was a pleasure.

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