

Habitability: Planetary vs Cosmopolitics¹

Iwona Janicka

Czech Academy of Sciences

Orcid ID #0000-0002-8433-9014

ABSTRACT

An important shift is taking place in environmental philosophy with regard to one of the field's most fundamental concepts. The notion of ecological "sustainability" is being slowly replaced by the notion of the "habitability" of Earth in much contemporary discussion of environmentalism. This article focuses on two philosophies of habitability that have significantly impacted our thinking about climate change in recent years: planetary and cosmopolitics. The two frameworks are frequently combined in various formulations of a more-than-human politics. Yet the philosophical paradigms, and their political implications, are, in fact, radically different, as this analysis will demonstrate. These crucial differences are amply evidenced through a comparative analysis of Dipesh Chakrabarty's recent writing on planetary and Isabelle Stengers' work on cosmopolitics. The article argues, ultimately, that planetary and cosmopolitics are incompatible. Further, the adoption of either approach corresponds to a specific philosophical and political choice that materially shapes the ways in which we think about politics with nonhumans in the 21st century.

Keywords: Isabelle Stengers, Dipesh Chakrabarty, Bruno Latour, planetary, cosmopolitics, habitability, politics, immunity

In current discussions on climate change, two philosophical paradigms have become particularly prominent in the environmental humanities: planetarity and cosmopolitics. These two frameworks have many important commonalities. Both, for instance, grapple with the disruption caused by climate change in traditional philosophy and attempt to conceptually reckon with the looming threat of a planet Earth that is uninhabitable. Both propose new concepts as a response to the fact that we lack suitable conceptual tools to understand climate change. Both try to radically rethink what it means to be a human being in an age of climate change, and propose a new narrative of how humans are related to the nonhuman world. They question who constitutes a political collective (“who is a we?”) and who counts as a political subject (“how many are we?”). Both frameworks gesture towards a new form of politics that would make nonhuman others an integral part of our political order. Finally, and most importantly, planetarity and cosmopolitics champion the concept of the “habitability” of planet Earth, instead of the well-established concept of “sustainability,” taken from ecology. The latter has faced widespread criticism, with many scholars highlighting the way in which “sustainability” has become a tool of neoliberalism. The neoliberal focus on a green transition in the name of “sustainability” has served to increase global inequality, rather than demonstrably improve people’s lives (Arboleda *Sustainability*; Johnston et al. *Nature’s Revenge*; Smythe “An Historian’s;” Irwin *Heidegger*). In the context of planetarity and cosmopolitics, “sustainability” is inherently flawed due to its short-sighted anthropocentrism, that is, in its focus on the preservation of human life to the detriment of other nonhuman beings. By contrast, habitability’s main concern is life—all life—and the ways in which we can maintain both human and nonhuman life that is inherently entangled on Earth. Habitability does not privilege human interests alone. It emphasizes instead building life-affirming coalitions with nonhumans that cohabit the planet. With a focus on habitability, planetarity and cosmopolitics are able to fundamentally reorient political ecology for the 21st century.

Due to such apparent similarities, planetarity and cosmopolitics are often used as synonyms in the environmental humanities.² However, as this article will show, the two frameworks exhibit significant differences that should not be overlooked. Despite their superficial correspondences, planetarity and cosmopolitics are, in fact, incompatible—at least in their current versions. Further, the adoption of either

approach corresponds to a specific philosophical and political choice that materially shapes the ways in which we think about politics with nonhumans in the 21st century.

Planetarity and cosmopolitics circulate widely in the environmental humanities, and the concepts have been enthusiastically adopted by a broad range of scholars, thinkers and artists.³ In this article, I juxtapose Dipesh Chakrabarty's writing on planetarity with Isabelle Stengers' work on cosmopolitics in order to elucidate the fundamental philosophical and political differences between the two conceptual frameworks of habitability. It is crucial to engage with Chakrabarty and Stengers because these scholars in particular have articulated the relevant concepts most extensively and consistently. More to the point, the contrast between planetarity and cosmopolitics is thrown into starkest relief by comparison of their work. For reasons of space, my treatment of these two approaches is partial and exploratory at best. I confine my analyses in particular to Chakrabarty's recent book *The Climate of History in a Planetary Age* (2021) and Stengers' volume *In Catastrophic Times* (2015). Planetarity and cosmopolitics constitute two intellectual formations that are fundamentally in tension with each other. In this article, I stage something like a conceptual collision in order to think through the frameworks' specific theoretical and political consequences in the age of climate change.

A comparison of planetarity and cosmopolitics is instructive in multiple ways. It does not only allow us to reflect on some of the emerging philosophical and political pathways opened up to us in, and by, political ecology, but it also reveals the importance of, what one might term, "disciplinary temperament" for thinking about climate change. "Thinking like a historian" (Chakrabarty) meets, in this article, "thinking like a chemist" (Stengers). Chakrabarty diagnoses climate change as a "problem of mismatched temporalities" (*Climate* 49): human time is suddenly being confronted with planetary time, a temporality incorporating "the inhumanly vast timescales of deep history" (*Climate* 4). For Stengers, however, it is a question of the risk involved in mixing together heterogeneous elements and the care such a procedure demands. This conceptual discrepancy owes largely to the differences of the scholars' philosophical influences. With its focus on discursivity and radical alterity, Chakrabarty's planetarity bears the marks of poststructuralism, specifically

Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, who was the first to use the term “planetarity,”⁴ alongside sustaining a dialogue with Hobbes, Kant and Heidegger. With its focus on practices, Stengers’ cosmopolitics descends productively from Gilles Deleuze and the pragmatist tradition, specifically Alfred North Whitehead and William James, while also drawing on ecofeminist activism and anti-capitalist initiatives. Even such a brief sketch of the frameworks’ widely divergent philosophical influences suggests significant differences between planetarity and cosmopolitics: each operates according to the logic of its highly specific intellectual lineage in order to make sense of climate change, with substantive differences in the shape of its politics.

NEGATIVE UNIVERSALITY VS PHARMAKON

From the outset, planetarity and cosmopolitics pose the problem of climate change very differently. Planetarity is a framework that attempts to meet the planet on its own terms and to consistently think through the aporia that follows from such an encounter. As such, Chakrabarty accepts the Anthropocene as an apt designation for our current epoch. “Anthropos”—a universal human being that is stripped of all characteristics such as race, gender or class—is considered a legitimate category of thought for Chakrabarty because it points to our status as *one* species “in spite of all our differentiation” (*Climate* 137). This flattening of human diversity might strike us as somewhat surprising coming from a postcolonial scholar, such as Chakrabarty, but, as he argues, the Anthropocene is useful terminology because it exposes us to the geological and biological aspects of our existence and forces us to consider natural history as an inextricable element of human history.⁵ The planet is considered as the Earth system in the singular; this removes the human as the central element in its history and introduces a new “planetary regime of historicity” (68).

What’s more, the Anthropocene makes us realize that we are “one species among many in the larger history of life” (127) and thereby destabilizes humanity’s supposed planetary supremacy. Although Chakrabarty acknowledges the importance of feminist and postcolonial critiques of the term Anthropocene, he considers the timeframes within which these critical frameworks often operate—several centuries of capitalism—as insufficient to account for our current ecological circumstances.

Planetary is a term that captures humans' new existential condition, one in which we experience "the rude shock of the planet's otherness" (67) in terms of Earth's inhuman timescales, its vast spaces and intricate processes. This otherness is manifested in the impossibility of a "communicative relationship" between humans and the planet that substantially differs from the kind of human-centric relationship evoked by familiar terminology such as "world," "earth" or "globe" (70). Following Spivak, the planet's radical alterity is a key focus, pointing to a fundamental aporia in which humanity finds itself: Anthropos faces the Other (the planet) that is not only by definition inaccessible to Anthropos but is also much stronger than us and can destroy the very conditions for our survival. As humans, we are unified—whether we like it or not—by the shock of this radical alterity. At the same time, however, we are transfixed by an inherent paradox, as we inhabit this otherness (Spivak *Death* 72). Chakrabarty's planetary captures this unique state of awe, uncanniness and paralysis.

Cosmopolitics engages with climate change in an altogether different manner. Instead of considering climate change as a universal problem that matters to all humans to the same degree, because it endangers us all equally (as is implied in the Anthropocene framework), cosmopolitics considers it a *common* challenge. "Common" is deployed here to denote something that we share (have in common), because we live on Earth. Crucially, it does not imply that all humans face the same challenges. Such variance in the consequences of climate change for different groups and individuals should be reflected in our conceptual framework. For this reason, the Anthropocene, in Stengers' view, is not an appropriate framework and, ideally, should be replaced entirely in the critical literature by a more apposite paradigm (Stengers et al., "In Conversation"). If planetary affirms a transcendental standpoint, cosmopolitics focuses on more down-to-earth matters: it considers climate change as a problem related to our practices that should be addressed collectively. Climate change thus becomes a "practical problem": a situated problem that is always articulated locally and is concerned with accommodating and giving space to a wide-range of practices, including even some that might be mutually incompatible (Stengers "Including" 28). Instead of posing questions that could be asked by "whoever" (a *detached* Anthropos) and giving answers that could be accepted by everyone equally, cosmopolitics situates

both questions and answers in specific situations and considers their consequences. It follows concrete *attachments* of humans to nonhumans.

From the perspective of cosmopolitics, even an appeal to a transcendental entity (climate crisis) cannot and does not elide differences between people, nor can such an appeal disqualify different, even opposing, standpoints. Cosmopolitics is thoroughly rooted in the here and now, posited as a world of devastation which we already inhabit, rather than the anticipation of total ecological apocalypse that threatens our future on Earth. Devastation here does not solely describe the destruction of the planet's natural resources, but also the destruction of a multiplicity of practices in which we have engaged with nonhumans. The driver of this wholesale devastation is capitalism. Capitalism, in cosmopolitics, is a destruction machine that turns our world into a lifeless desert. The challenge, therefore, is to protect ourselves collectively from that machine, and the ongoing destruction it wreaks (Savransky and Stengers "Relearning"). Cosmopolitics questions how to create resources today that future generations could use to inhabit the earth and to collectively heal it (Stengers *Catastrophic*). In this respect, cosmopolitics is a future- and practice-oriented framework, with the aim of enabling the collective construction of life-affirming futures today. It operates "on the ground" as an ongoing negotiation between heterogeneous elements (people, nonhumans, environments), establishing a relationship that renders each party more capable, both individually and collectively.⁶

Planetaryity is concerned with much loftier things than the down-to-earth approach advocated for in cosmopolitics. The former calls forth a new version of universality—humans as one species, the planet as one Earth system. Yet, it must be acknowledged that this universality is posited as fundamentally different from its previous reiterations in the history of philosophy. The preoccupation is no longer on essentializing humans by defining them with a positive common feature, such as *logos* or *agency*. Planetaryity is a tool of universalization but, notably, the planetary universal is an empty or "negative universal" devoid of any specific content. Instead, the planetary universal "arises from a shared sense of catastrophe" (Chakrabarty *Climate* 45). It opens humans to nonhumans because this catastrophe is shared across all life, and contends that all life matters as a condition for a collective survival.

The question of universality is rearticulated in the framework of planetarity in order to rethink the planet as an entity that unifies without recourse to a ready-made totalizing vision of humanity. For Chakrabarty, the planet is an agent of unification as a result of the shared threat to human and non-human survival. The negative universality of planetarity commingles human life with nonhuman existence across extended timespans.

Stengers responds to the existential threat of climate change altogether differently. She employs the term "Gaia" for our current condition to designate the "intrusion" into our world and into our temporalities that forces us to think and feel anew in a world where "*there is no afterwards*", that is, where there is no future in which the climate crisis has been resolved (Stengers *Catastrophic* 43-44, 57). Gaia creates an unknown with which we have to deal constantly (47). For Stengers, it is essential to avoid conceptualizing Gaia as a figure that enacts revenge on us for what we are doing to her. This would presume that Gaia cares for us. Stengers' Gaia is perhaps best, albeit provocatively, conceived of as a bully. She intrudes, she threatens, and she does not care about our responses. Nevertheless, in order to survive we must continue to engage with this "bully:" we need to respond to the challenge of climate change and to each other, human and nonhuman alike. Instead of thinking in terms of unity, Stengers suggests that we need to consider the radical disruption that climate change has introduced into our worlds and, even more importantly, start learning to "compose" new worlds in this situation, "creating cooperative practices" towards more habitable futures (57). Climate crisis is a problem that is posed in the here and now, and never in general. Therefore, Stengers' Gaia stands in for an event. It challenges us to define what matters to us, as individuals and as collectives, and thereby forces us to redefine ourselves. The planet and nonhumans (re)present to us radical alterity, and thereby seem to offer no point of contact or communication. But this does not, for Stengers, provide sufficient reason to avoid engaging with the Other. Cosmopolitics insists upon recognition of our ecological complicity and our forever-compromised status.⁷ There is never a universally correct position that could absolve us from considering the cost of our decisions to others (human and nonhuman), nor would any singular "planetary" response to the problem of climate crisis be appropriate or sufficient. Hence, Stengers' focus is squarely on the varied

consequences of climate change. Cosmopolitics attempts to conceptualize climate crisis without turning to a universal—such as a single species or planet—because we never encounter a “human species” or a “planet” but rather concrete people, animals, plants, environments and assemblages (Stengers *Catastrophic* 137). The idea of unity, for Stengers, is inherently problematic. It “always means mobilisation, what was asked from armies having to follow orders in a faithful and immediate way” (Stengers “Introductory” 192). It forces us to forget our multiple obligations and the broader consequences of our actions.

From this perspective, cosmopolitics arguably forecloses planetarity as a philosophical framework to tackle climate change. It rejects the possibility of posing climate change as a general problem that could create decisions applicable to all equally and accepted by all without discussion (“everyone should agree that...”) (Stengers “Introductory” 193). The climate crisis is often posed in terms of “either/or:” we either do X, or we will all die. Stengers terms such “either/or” statements “infernal alternatives.”⁸ This does not equate to Stengers underestimating the gravity of climate change. Rather, she argues that such “either/or” statements take us hostage (Despret and Stengers *Les faiseuses* 78). They serve us ready-made problems that do not allow us to construct our own questions which would lead in turn to new propositions. None of the options offered by the “either/or” formulation are appropriate, and the way the problem is posed predetermines a response, a set-up that is rarely ever satisfactory. In this way, from a cosmopolitical point of view, the planetarity paradigm (and the Anthropocene) take us hostage. By its characterization of climate change as a universal problem requiring universal solutions, planetarity obliges a certain kind of submission. In cosmopolitics, there is no single species that responds to a single “planetary” problem. Instead, climate change demands a multiplicity of responses that reconfigure the stakes of the situation and the very conditions for raising a question in the first place. Instead of posing “either/or” questions, Stengers prefers to add “thickness” and complexity to questions by thinking in terms of “and, and” (Stengers “Introductory” 193; *Catastrophic* 9, 34). Such a procedure can render us more capable because we are collectively trying to formulate a problem, and open up new possibilities as a result. This is the logic of the pharmakon, of remedy and poison in one: how do you think “under threat” without getting threatened, without

becoming a hostage to a question posed in an impossible way? Such pharmakon-thinking lies at the heart of cosmopolitics (Stengers *Catastrophic* 100-105). It aims at inhabiting a thicker ongoing present, creating niches and collective enmeshments that resist any triumphant truth (Savransky and Stengers “Relearning”) and “reject the right to disqualify” (Debaise and Stengers “Insistence” 15). While Chakrabarty attempts to renew the concept of the universal for the 21st century by thinking about one species and one Earth system that are united through a shared catastrophe (negative universality), Stengers prefers to formulate the key question of climate change through pharmakon, through a unique alloy of heterogeneous elements that always has the potential to create something more powerful (remedy), yet at the same time, always runs the risk of destruction (poison).

OUTSIDE/INSIDE

Another significant difference between planetary and cosmopolitics is their relationship to the outside. While the outside is crucial to planetary, it has little significance for cosmopolitics, which is much more preoccupied with immanence and interiority. Indeed, Chakrabarty conceives of planetary as a large project in outer space. The planet is not only something that unifies humans and nonhumans because of a shared looming catastrophe, but also because there are other planets around us. Planetary takes us into outer space. It wrestles with the outside conceived both as cosmic space (out there) and as radical alterity (the inaccessible Other, the difference we cannot bridge). As Chakrabarty claims, planetary is “a comparatist enterprise” because it “entails a degree of interplanetary research and thinking” (*Climate* 79). We are offered a view of the Earth from the outside and this outside—including lifeless outer space—determines our redefinition of where we are and who we are. Yet, as Chakrabarty points out, this comparative study is rather peculiar: the Earth is the only planet containing life, and thus serves as a unique, and singular, sample case. Planetary challenges us to come to terms with the reality of the lifeless outer space that enfolds us all. As humans are only a tiny and incidental fraction of Earth’s existence, the planetary perspective for Chakrabarty “has nothing moral or ethical or normative about it” (*Climate* 90). The only ethical touchstone is radical

otherness, with which, by definition, we cannot engage and which serves more as a signpost for ethical caution than a moral imperative.

While Chakrabarty moves *away* from the Earth to conceive of planetarity, Stengers passes *through* the Earth to conceptualize cosmopolitics. Immanence anchors Stengers' approach to the point that, arguably, the outside (including outer space) does not functionally exist in cosmopolitics. Cosmopolitics as an "ecology of practices" insists on the art of response-ability (Haraway *When Species Meet; Staying*) and on pragmatism. As discussed previously, "radical otherness" as a concept is taken in cosmopolitics less as a reminder to exercise ethical caution, and more as a pretext to avoid engagement with fundamentally different entities. In cosmopolitics, all practices are forms of engagement with radical alterity, whether through sciences, technology, gardening or animal training. Such practices are forms of constant engagement, even communication, with entities that are absolutely and radically other. Radical alterity of this kind, however, is never in the singular, but always operates in the plural. It is made up of multiple radical alterities with which we engage while living on Earth through partial, committed and non-innocent collective practices. The question for Stengers is therefore: what does this specific Other, this nonhuman, demand of me? How can I respond to it in a way that honors its specificity and makes both parties more capable than before (see Debaise and Stengers "Insistence")?

Cosmopolitics is about the creation of apparatuses that gather people concerned about specific situations to work with alterities. It focuses on "the art of paying attention" that, for Stengers, is not merely a skill but rather a "matter of learning and cultivating" to engage with entities that require our attention (*Catastrophic* 62). In this sense, climate change is an obligation that calls for our collective response, anchored in the concreteness of our lives. It is a cause for thinking together, not as a species but as concerned collectives that are affected differently by a shared problem. Strikingly, cosmopolitics, like planetarity, is a comparatist enterprise, albeit in the form of a "dedicated comparative" (*un comparatif dédié*) rather than a planetary comparative. Its point of departure is never a universal claim, but one that *troubles* the universal. A "dedicated comparative" is not universally "true" but is, nevertheless, "truer" in a given situation, having been conceived from within a specific situation,

with commitment to discover what works better in that situation (cf. Despret and Stengers *Les faiseuses* 146, Cassin *Éloge* 158). It is the universal of the sophists.⁹ From this perspective, the outside as radical alterity does not exist in cosmopolitics: there we are utterly dedicated to making sense of the otherness that we encounter every day on an ongoing basis, albeit in fragmentary and compromised ways. It is a form of constructing interiority with radical alterities.

Perhaps one of the most obvious differences between planetary and cosmopolitics is their widely divergent approaches to the issue of scale. While planetary embraces scale in the largest possible sense, cosmopolitics problematizes it, and, indeed, urges against scaling up. In the Anthropocene, human beings become geological agents and this means, for Chakrabarty notably, that we must “scale up our imagination of the human” (*Climate* 31). The problem of climate change overwhelms and out-scales humans in terms of both space and time. By consequence, the tacit assumption of planetary is that we require tools that are comparably “overwhelming” to deal with this challenge. If we consider the planet as “a category of humanist thought” (*Climate* 67), we must, paradoxically, factor into our thinking the extended past and future without humans. Earth without us is the “rude shock” of planetary, the shock of decentred humanity that is its core paradox: humans exert significant impact on the Earth’s processes, and yet, we are ultimately insignificant in the interplanetary scheme of things. With its vision of scaling-up, planetary finds itself at the opposite end of the spatial spectrum from cosmopolitics. Cosmopolitics is wary of scaling-up, due to the fact that, in the grand process of changing orders of magnitude, the necessity of reformatting the framework is frequently forgotten. It is too often reminiscent of an easy computer zoom-out when interacting with online maps. Such an operation of expansion without changing the framework at hand is termed “scalability.” For cosmopolitics, as an ecology, thinking in terms of scalability is problematic. Drawing on the work of Anna Tsing, Stengers argues that thinking in terms of scalability equates to destruction: not enough attention is paid to the various operations that take place in the process of scaling up, and their attendant consequences. As a result, the process leaves ruins behind (Tsing “On Nonscalability;” Stengers *Résister* 50).

In this light, it could be argued, admittedly provocatively, that the Anthropocene and planetarity are projects of scalability of the human in the Tsing-Stengers sense. The human is ballooned to the size of the planet without reformatting the framework. From a cosmopolitical perspective, there are two possible interpretations of this philosophical gesture. First, the act of scaling up paralyzes us, and leads us conceptually into a corner. This is because no human category (whether ethical, social or political) has any meaning on the planetary scale. Whilst the human is a geological force, the planet remains indifferent to humans. The Earth will recover with or without us. Whatever we do will ultimately matter very little. For this reason, setting our sights on other planets for the future seems like a gesture of hope. Such a philosophical scenario for “thinking like a planet” poses an impasse for humans on Earth at the start of the 21st century because it blocks us from responding to the concrete challenges of the climate crisis that we face in the here and now, and makes us forget our obligations to other beings. Such thinking is inherent to planetarity; it constitutes one of the key problems of the framework for thinking effectively about climate change.

However, another more generous reading of planetarity from a cosmopolitical point of view is possible. It could be termed “immunitarian planetarity.” From this angle, planetarity as a framework itself serves as a *pharmakon* to the human species. It can be poison (when we say that we impact the Earth on a planetary level in a cumulative way but as a species we are insignificant in the grand scheme of things) or a remedy (it can be an injection of radical alterity that should keep us in check by reminding us of our significant impact on other nonhuman cohabitants of the planet, thereby issuing a call for collective responsibility).¹⁰ The latter, more generous, interpretation transforms planetarity into an immunitarian tool on the species level. If this framework is accepted and applied, we must nevertheless subsequently reformat the frameworks in play to act and think on the cosmopolitical level in order to ensure our actions are well-suited to specific circumstances. By contrast to planetarity, in cosmopolitics we do not need “overwhelming” tools to deal with climate change. The resources for thinking and acting are already employed by various groups, notably environmental anti-capitalist movements, including ecofeminists. We need to turn

our attention to them to learn alternative ways to create habitable worlds. This leads us inexorably to politics.

POLITICS OF DWELLING VS PACT POLITICS

The politics that both planetary and cosmopolitics envision is a politics of habitability. Both frameworks ask: how do we create a habitable world for humans and nonhumans? How do we build life-affirming futures? Even though they share a common horizon of a more-than-human politics, the two approaches espouse very different ideas about how this politics should be realized. It should be noted that neither planetary nor cosmopolitics engages explicitly in concrete proposals on how to move to a new political order, nor do they try to explicitly mobilize us to transform the world. Nevertheless, we can sketch the outlines of what each of these frameworks implies in political terms. While planetary gestures to a politics of dwelling, cosmopolitics favors what might best be termed “pact politics.”

Planetary defines politics as “that which helps humans to be at home on earth” (Chakrabarty *Climate* 9). Such politics has an intergenerational and interspecies orientation, because it should help “humans to be at home on earth beyond the time of the living” (9). This beyond-life orientation amounts to a productively shocking injection of radical alterity, one that should stay with us while we reorient our politics to meet planetary challenges in order to prevent us from harboring any notion of human dominion over the planet. From this perspective, anything that works “against the logic of human dwelling” (10) is antipolitical and, for Chakrabarty, this is precisely the problem with capitalism. Capitalism is, in his words, an “antipolitical machine” (9). Chakrabarty proposes an open definition of politics, by which he means “*all* activities undertaken to deal with the consequences of—and hence the future posed by—global warming” (10). In this way, he subsumes all political agents and all activities on various levels to the problem of climate change. An important question for Chakrabarty is: “How do we (re)imagine the human as a form of life connected to other forms of life, and how do we then base our politics on that knowledge?” (126). Likewise, he asks how we may do such work with regard to the non-living, such as glaciers or rivers. This is a challenge to all modern political thought, because we do

not possess the conceptual tools to relate humans and nonhumans in a political manner. For Chakrabarty, however, this problem seems to be particularly acute: the overwhelming scale of planetarity invites reciprocally grand responses, such as a form of planetary governance or wide-scale geoengineering that would address the problem on the necessarily scaled-up level, trumping all other merely “global” concerns of climate justice. It is, thus, reasonable to enquire to what extent the planetary politics of dwelling gestures toward a politics of submission.

Cosmopolitics, in contrast, focuses on agreements that do not derive from submission (Stengers “Une politique”). No transcendence (common good, reason or ideal of peace) has the right to silence “minor” reasons and automatically override them. Stengers is interested in how diverging parties, without anything in common to start with, are able to communicate and think “with one another, through one another, around a situation that has become a ‘common cause.’” Climate change is a cause for collective thinking and something that *makes us think* (*Catastrophic* 131). Importantly, for Stengers, diverging parties do not have to fuse with one another, overcoming their differences, in order to agree. They neither have to become a one (unity) nor are they the same (identity in series). Instead, they should honor their divergences and abide by their own versions of an agreement. To illustrate such an alternative to fusion or sameness, Stengers often gives Deleuze’s example of the “noce contre nature” (unnatural coupling) of a wasp and an orchid, where there is no wasp-orchid union, but rather a situation where “[w]asps and orchids give each quite other meanings to the relation which was produced between them” (Stengers, “Introductory” 194). Cosmopolitics is a pact politics because “eventual agreements will always be local agreements between parts that keep diverging” (Stengers “Including” 28). It is always a temporary pact that can be revised by a new assembly of concerned participants.

Who, then, undertakes politics in these two frameworks? The relatively stark divergence between the frameworks’ politics logically leads to the articulation of distinct political subjects in each case. Planetarity accepts the gender-less, class-less and race-less subject circulated by the Anthropocene, one that could be termed a “ghost subject” as it is thoroughly detached from anything that would make it earthly and concrete. Nevertheless, Chakrabarty tries to give shape to this spectral subject, by

rearticulating it through a localized Dalit body. As Chakrabarty claims: “The Dalit’s body is itself constructed nonanthropocentrically—it is always human *with* animals, live or dead, and embedded in the world of microbes (with its relationship to the handling of waste)” (*Climate* 126). Non-purity is posited as a means to exit our problematic anthropocentrism. This combination of the ghost subject of the Anthropocene and the singular-yet-particular Dalit body creates a “planetary body” as a political principle. This planetary body as a political subject operates as a reminder of our entanglement with other beings (human and nonhuman) and should help us imagine new forms of more-than-human politics. Even though “Dalit” is an activist term, the “Dalit body” is “an abstraction” with which no one can fully coincide (*Climate* 122). By combining the human species (the universal) and the Dalit body (singular-yet-particular), Chakrabarty poses an important problem of conceptualizing a planetary political agent—yet without proposing, thus far, any conceptual or practical infrastructure with regard to how such planetary bodies could organize on a collective level.

Cosmopolitics has a different political subject at its core, one that shares features with the political subject of ecofeminism.¹¹ This subject is precarious, connected, and interdependent. In contrast to the autonomous subject of modern political theory, it acknowledges being born of others and reliant on human and nonhuman others. It is always situated, a product of its environment. It is gendered, classed, raced and it acknowledges its obligations to human and nonhuman others. It is a collective subject because, in order to exist, it needs to bring about its existence through engagement with others around a common issue. For this reason, the political subject of cosmopolitics is an activist through and through. Activists are called forth by a common problem that is not articulated for everyone in the same way. They do not have to agree on the reasons why they take action. They gather together because it is only as a collective that they can make sense of a situation and resist it. Activism always responds locally to a problem and is focused on “traversal alliances” rather than a mobilization for a cause with other militants (see Savransky and Stengers “Relearning” 139). Activists create “habitable worlds” one step at a time. A habitable world is defined in cosmopolitics as a world that is just a little bit better than it was before, as opposed to a utopian world, where good has finally triumphed over evil (Despret and Stengers *Les faiseuses* 201). The political subject of cosmopolitics is

therefore local, collective, interdependent, and fundamentally activist. Its existence is rooted in the creation of constructive alternatives with others for living on the planet today.

CONCLUSION

This discussion has hopefully shown that, despite their superficial similarities, planetarity and cosmopolitics, in actuality, stand far apart both philosophically and politically. Chakrabarty and Stengers develop their politics with nonhumans in opposite directions. Planetarity is an injection of radical alterity that should keep us in check by reminding us of our *vanitas* in the great interplanetary scheme of things, and of our significant impact on other cohabitants of the planet. Cosmopolitics, by contrast, is a pharmacological apprenticeship that focuses on the concreteness and entanglement of human-nonhuman worlds through a focus on practices and the activation of specific collectives. Each framework issues a fundamental challenge to the other; the two exist in a state of irresolvable intellectual tension. From the perspective of planetarity, it is questionable whether the grassroots approach of cosmopolitics is enough to respond to the challenges of global climate change. In turn, from the cosmopolitical perspective, planetarity's paralyzing effect and its potential for overriding "minor" reasons (race, gender, class) tied to earthly minutiae of the "global" rather than the planetary, represent fundamental problems.

Strikingly, Stengers' cosmopolitics and Chakrabarty's planetarity are linked by the philosophical figure of Bruno Latour. Whilst Latour employs the term "cosmopolitics" and was deeply influenced by Stengers' work, his cosmopolitics also has much in common with Chakrabarty's planetarity.¹² Latour's interest in scale, his proclivity for scholars of the Earth System Sciences, his acceptance of the term Anthropocene, his interest in rethinking the concept of the universal and his rather gentle critique of capitalism situate him as in fellowship with, or at least highly sympathetic to, planetarity. In fact, Latour's work gestures towards a curious amalgam of cosmopolitics and planetarity. In the postscript of Chakrabarty's *Climate of History in a Planetary Age*, Latour even features quite prominently as an interlocutor. Notably, Latour and

Chakrabarty find a common language there; it is difficult to imagine a similar dialogue between Chakrabarty and Stengers.

The question ultimately becomes: how can we develop both planetary and cosmopolitics to address the problematic features specific to each framework, and thereby produce a paradigm that is better equipped to deal with climate change? Perhaps, in light of the comparative examination above, planetary could be transformed into a more practice-based and collective engagement, a move towards a “performatist planetary”.¹³ Such a planetary would be geared towards concrete engagements with nonhumans, a shift that would, to some extent, overcome the paralyzing quality of Chakrabarty’s framework. Cosmopolitics, in turn, could be rearticulated to include some degree of scaling up. One way to do this would be to propose a new ecological “grand narrative” that would redefine the place of human beings in relation to nonhuman others for the age of climate crisis. Such a new “cosmopolitical grand narrative” would have to be more intersectionally diverse than its problematic predecessors and would have to include nonhumans as integral to a definition of a human.¹⁴ This would, to some extent at least, enlarge the scope of political action from small-scale local activist engagements, allowing for broader and more widely impactful initiatives. Admittedly, neither Chakrabarty nor Stengers would likely be interested in pursuing these conceptual paths themselves: the suggested adjustments sit rather uncomfortably with their carefully constructed philosophical frameworks. Nevertheless, this is perhaps a productive task for scholars, activists and artists, with the aim of injecting a level of radical alterity into the frameworks at hand in order to make them a cause for thinking and acting together even more effectively in response to the challenge of climate change.¹⁵

NOTES

1. This research has been supported by the International Visegrad Fund (no. 62410008) and has been completed during a visiting research stay at the Department of Contemporary Continental Philosophy at the Institute of Philosophy, Czech Academy of Sciences. I would like to thank the reviewers of *Migrating Minds* for their valuable feedback on this piece.
2. See on bringing planetary and cosmopolitics together, for instance, Szerszynski “Planetary Alterity,” Hui “Cosmotechnics as Cosmopolitics,” Conway “On the Way

to Planet Politics.” For a discussion of planetarity and cosmopolitics in a different theoretical framework, see Gilroy “Planetarity and Cosmopolitics.” While planetarity is a relatively recent term, cosmopolitics and cosmopolitanism have a long tradition spanning the Stoics, Immanuel Kant and countless contemporary thinkers, most notably Ulrich Beck, Kwame Anthony Appiah, David Harvey and Etienne Balibar. Stengers, however, proposes a different, non-Kantian, idea of cosmopolitics. See Janicka “The Janus Face.”

3. See, notably, Connolly *Facing the Planetary*, Pratt *Planetary Longings*, Goodman *Planetary Lens*, Ballard *Art and Nature*, Elias and Moraru *The Planetary Turn*, Drage *Planetary Humanism*, Carauş *Militant Cosmopolitics*, Leinius *The Cosmopolitics of Solidarity*, de la Cadena “Indigenous Cosmopolitics,” Tabak *Information Cosmopolitics*, Bold *Indigenous Perceptions*, Blok and Farias *Urban Cosmopolitics*, Gomes da Cunha *Maroon Cosmopolitics*.
4. See Spivak “Planetarity.”
5. There has been much critique of the term “Anthropocene” and its alleged neutrality from a wide range of perspectives. Notably, see: Fressoz and Bonneuil *Shock*, Haraway “Anthropocene,” Parenti and Moore “Anthropocene”; and for an inspiring list of alternatives, see: Hallé and Millon “Infinity.”
6. Interestingly, Spivak points to Isabelle Stengers’ cosmopolitics as a “custodial” form of planetarity that aims to prepare us epistemologically for how to become “the custodians of our very own planet,” how to become accountable for our environmental impact. In contrast, planetarity, for Spivak, does not refer to any such “applicable methodology” (Spivak “Planetarity” 290–291).
7. On ecological complicity see Shotwell *Against Purity*.
8. On infernal alternatives see Pignarre and Stengers *Capitalist Sorcery*.
9. See, on the question of the universal and the sophists, the work of Barbara Cassin, specifically *Sophistical Practice and Éloge*.
10. On responsibility in this context, see, for instance, Zarka *Refonder* and Haraway *When Species Meet*.
11. Here, we can think of such ecofeminist thinkers as Françoise d’Eaubonne, Vandana Shiva, Maria Mies, Susan Griffin, Silvia Federici, Greta Gaard, Carolyn Merchant, Ynestra King, Val Plumwood, Ariel Salleh, Catriona Sandilands, Carol J. Adams and, more recently, Emilie Hache or Niamh Moore. Despite their differences, all these ecofeminists agree that humans are non-sovereign subjects who are deeply interconnected with their natural, social and technological environments. Their focus on concrete practices to create habitable worlds in small scale communities makes them much closer to cosmopolitics than to planetarity.
12. On the difference between Latour’s and Stengers’ cosmopolitics, see: Janicka “The Janus Face.”
13. On “performatism” in the context of planetarity, see Eshelman “Archetypologies.”
14. Grand narratives have fallen into ill repute in result of a series of trenchant critiques of philosophical totalizations by an array of poststructuralist philosophers (Michel

Foucault, Gilles Deleuze, Félix Guattari, Jacques Derrida, Jean Baudrillard, Jean-François Lyotard), alongside critiques of the notion of the “universal subject” (male, white, straight, master) by feminist, queer, posthuman, anarchist, and postcolonial thinkers and activists. This is a richly deserved critique. However, I wish to suggest here that today we need a different story about who “we” are as a species and as a community, and one way to do this would be to rethink metanarratives with ecofeminism and cosmopolitics towards pluriversal (rather than universal) versions.

WORKS CITED

- Arboleda, Gabriel. *Sustainability and Privilege: A Critique of Social Design Practice*. Charlottesville: U of Virginia P, 2022.
- Ballard, Susan. *Art and Nature in the Anthropocene: Planetary Aesthetics*. New York: Routledge, 2021.
- Blok, Anders, and Ignacio Farias. *Urban Cosmopolitics: Agencements, Assemblies, Atmospheres*. London: Routledge, 2016, <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781315748177>
- Bold, Rosalyn, ed. *Indigenous Perceptions of the End of the World. Creating a Cosmopolitics of Change*. Cham: Springer International Publishing, 2019, <https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-13860-8>
- Cadena (de la), Marisol. “Indigenous Cosmopolitics in the Andes: Conceptual Reflections Beyond ‘Politics.’” *Cultural Anthropology* 25 (2), 2010, p. 334–70, <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1548-1360.2010.01061.x>.
- Carauş, Tamara. *Militant Cosmopolitics: Another World Horizon*. Edinburgh: Edinburgh UP, 2022, <https://doi.org/10.1515/9781399507929>.
- Cassin, Barbara. *Éloge de la traduction. Compliquer l’universel*. Paris: Fayard, 2016.
- . *Sophisticated Practice: Toward a Consistent Relativism*. New York: Fordham UP, 2014, <https://doi.org/10.1515/9780823256426>
- Chakrabarty, Dipesh. *The Climate of History in a Planetary Age*. Chicago and London: U of Chicago P, 2021.
- Connolly, William E. *Facing the Planetary: Entangled Humanism and the Politics of Swarming*. Durham: Duke UP, 2017, <https://doi.org/10.1515/9780822373254>.
- Conway, Philip R. “On the Way to Planet Politics: From Disciplinary Demise to Cosmopolitical Coordination.” *International Relations* 34 (2), 2020, p. 157-179, <https://doi.org/10.1177/0047117819879482>.
- Debaise, Didier and Isabelle Stengers. “The Insistence of Possibles: Towards a Speculative Pragmatism.” *Parse Journal* 7, 2017, p. 13–19.

- Despret, Vinciane and Isabelle Stengers. *Les faiseuses d'histoires. Que font les femmes à la pensée?* Paris: La Découverte, 2011.
- Drage, Eleanor. *Planetary Humanism of European Women's Science Fiction: An Experience of the Impossible*. New York: Routledge, 2023.
- Elias, Amy J. and Christian Moraru, eds. *The Planetary Turn. Relationality and Geoaesthetics in the Twenty-First Century*. Evanston, IL: Northwestern UP, 2015.
- Eshelman, Raoul. "Archetypologies of the Human. Planetary Performatism, Cinematic Relationality, and Iñárritu's *Babel*." In *The Planetary Turn Relationality and Geoaesthetics in the Twenty-First Century*. Edited by Christian Moraru and Amy J. Elias. Evanston, Illinois: Northwestern UP, 2015, p. 89–105.
- Fressoz, Jean-Baptiste and Christophe Bonneuil. *The Shock of the Anthropocene. The Earth, History and Us*. Translated from French by David Fernbach. London: Verso, 2017.
- Gilroy, Paul. "Planetary and Cosmopolitics." *British Journal of Sociology* 61 (3), 2010, p. 620–626.
- Gomes da Cunha, Olívia Maria ed. *Maroon Cosmopolitics: Personhood, Creativity and Incorporation*. Leiden, Boston: Brill, 2019.
- Goodman, Audrey. *Planetary Lens*. Lincoln: U of Nebraska P, 2021.
- Hallé, Clémence and Anne-Sophie Milon. "The Infinity of the Anthropocene: A (Hi)story with a Thousand Names." In *Critical Zones. The Science and Politics of Landing on Earth*. Edited by Bruno Latour and Peter Weibel. Karlsruhe: ZMK and London: The MIT Press Cambridge, p. 44–49.
- Haraway, Donna J. "Anthropocene, Capitalocene, Plantationocene, Chthulucene: Making Kin." *Environmental Humanities* 6, 2015, p. 159–165. <https://doi.org/10.1215/22011919-3615934>
- . *Staying with the Trouble. Making Kin in the Chthulucene*. Durham and London: Duke UP, 2016.
- . *When Species Meet*. Minneapolis: U of Minnesota P, 2008.
- Hui, Yuk. "Cosmotechnics as Cosmopolitics". *e-flux Journal* 86, 2017 n/p. www.e-flux.com/journal/86/161887/cosmotechnics-as-cosmopolitics/.
- Irwin, Ruth. *Heidegger, Politics and Climate Change: Risking It All*. London: Continuum, 2008, <https://doi.org/10.5040/9781472546821>.
- Janicka, Iwona. "The Janus Face of Cosmopolitics: The Concept of Universality in Isabelle Stengers and Bruno Latour," *Philosophy Today* 68 (3), 2024, p. 129–145.

- Johnston, Josee, Mike Gismondi and James Goodman. *Nature's Revenge: Reclaiming Sustainability in an Age of Corporate Globalization*. Toronto: U of Toronto P, 2006.
- Leinius, Johanna. *The Cosmopolitics of Solidarity: Social Movement Encounters Across Difference*. Cham: Springer, 2022.
- Parenti, Christian and Jason W. Moore. *Anthropocene or Capitalocene? Nature, History, and the Crisis of Capitalism*. Oakland, CA: PM Press, 2016.
- Pignarre, Philippe and Isabelle Stengers. *Capitalist Sorcery: Breaking the Spell*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011.
- Pratt, Mary Louise. *Planetary Longings. The Photo-Poetics of Western Women's Writing*. Durham: Duke UP, 2022, <https://doi.org/10.1215/9781478022909>.
- Savransky, Martin and Isabelle Stengers. "Relearning the Art of Paying Attention: A Conversation." *SubStance* 47(1), 2018, p. 130–45, <https://doi.org/10.1353/sub.2018.0009>
- Shotwell, Alexis. *Against Purity: Living Ethically in Compromised Times*. Minneapolis: U of Minnesota P, 2016.
- Smythe, Kathleen R. "An Historian's Critique of Sustainability." *Culture Unbound* 6 (5), 2014, p. 913–929.
- Spivak, Gayatri Chakravorty. *Death of a Discipline*. New York: Columbia UP, 2023 [2003].
—. "Planetary." *Paragraph* 38 (2), 2015, p. 290–292.
- Stengers, Isabelle. *In Catastrophic Times. Resisting the Coming Barbarism*. Translated from French by Andrew Goffrey. London: Open Humanities Press, Meson Press, 2015.
—. "Including Nonhumans in Political Theory: Opening the Pandora's Box?" In *Political Matter*. Edited by Bruce Braun and Sarah J. Whatmore. Minneapolis, MN: U of Minnesota P, 2010, p. 3–33.
—. "Introductory Notes on an Ecology of Practices." *Cultural Studies Review* 11 (1), 2005, p. 183–96. <https://doi.org/10.5130/csr.v11i1.3459>
—. "Une politique de l'hérésie." *Vacarme* 2 (4), 2002, vacarme.org/article263.html
—. *Résister au désastre. Dialogue avec Martin Schaffner*. Marseille: Editions Wildproject, 2019.
—., Marc Higgins, and Maria Wallace. "In Conversation with Isabelle Stengers: Ontological Politics in Catastrophic Times." In *Reimagining Science Education in the Anthropocene*, Vol. 2. Edited by S. Tolbert, M.F. Wallace, M. Higgins, J. Bazzul. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2024, p. 363–387, https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-031-35430-4_20
- Szerszynski, Bronislaw. "Planetary Alterity, Solar Cosmopolitics and the Parliament of Planets." In *Environmental Alterities*. Edited by Cristóbal Bonelli and Antonia Walford. Manchester: Mattering Press, 2021, p. 204–226.

Tabak, Edin. *Information Cosmopolitics: An Actor-Network Theory Approach to Information Practices*. Burlington: Elsevier Science, 2015.

Tsing, Anna Lowenhaupt. "On Nonscalability." *Common Knowledge* 18 (3), 2012, p. 505–24.
<https://doi.org/10.1215/0961754X-1630424>

Zarka, Yves Charles. *Refonder le cosmopolitisme*. Paris: PUF, 2014.

Iwona Janicka is Research Team Leader at CETE-P and Senior Researcher at the Institute of Philosophy of the Czech Academy of Sciences. Her research concentrates on 20th- and 21st-century continental philosophy, feminist philosophy, political philosophy and environmental philosophy, with a particular focus on the question of social transformation and universality. She is the author of *Theorizing Contemporary Anarchism. Solidarity, Mimesis and Radical Social Change* (Bloomsbury Academic, 2017). Her current book project examines how to rethink politics with nonhumans in the context of climate change. Her work has been published in journals such as *Theory, Culture & Society*, *Philosophy Today*, *Textual Practice* and *SubStance*.