

We Humans. Epochal Consciousness and Responsibility in the 'Anthropocene'

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We are living in the Anthropocene. We have good reasons to dwell a bit with this sentence, as its meaning as well as the speech act of its proclamation require thorough and careful interpretation. It is a highly disputed and outrageous sentence, a hyper-sentence maybe, as its scope and meaning push against the limits of our understanding. I at least have to confess that I do not really know about its proper reading. Who is the 'we' here? What is the ontological status of this phenomenon called 'Anthropocene'? What does 'living in' mean? Since when? For how long? And why declaring it now? What kind of historical momentum does this sentence imply? Does it entail values and evaluation? Does it have normative appeal? If so, to whom and what about? What would be the proper response? And who is in charge to answer these questions anyway? – Not one of these questions allows for an easy answer. I take them nonetheless to express the need for the humanities in general and philosophy in particular, as these questions have to be dealt with when debating anthropogenic global warming and its ideological as well as ethical consequences. In this paper, I will spend some time asking to the historical momentousness of the aforementioned claim – *we are living in the Anthropocene* – ; in particular, I will dwell with the ontological status of the Anthropocene and ask who is meant, when we say that we are living in the Anthropocene. To lay my cards on the table, here is my main thesis: The Anthropocene urges us to revisit human universalism. But instead of endorsing some old-fashioned metaphysical humanism, I want to suggest human responsiveness as the key to Humanism 2.0, which will correct modern ideas of autonomy towards an idea of subjectivity genuinely thought as relying on responsibility. In order to do so, I first want to recalibrate our attentiveness toward

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the extraordinary scales and measures that the Anthropocene-thesis in fact is working on, pondering on the idea that the proclamation of the Anthropocene in itself marks an epochal event implying epochal consciousness and a peculiar epochal attunement. I then will ponder who is meant in the first-person-plural pronoun of the 'we', taking issue with contemporary posthumanist and neomarxist positions. I end up drawing on a suggestion recently made by historian Dipesh Chakrabarty, though giving it a phenomenological, maybe Heideggerian twist.

We better start thinking!

The proclamation of the Anthropocene, the Human age, as the current geological epoch is highly contested and has given a twist to the scientific as well as the political debates concerning climate change and the threat of a dramatic transformation of the eco-system of planet Earth (Ellis 2018, Lewis and Maslin 2018). The historical momentousness of this proclamation is obvious, as the claim entails an appeal to engage with the present conditions of what there is. It's time for thinking.

Such an appeal – it's time for thinking – addresses the present situation in its topicality. One might object that such an appeal is superfluous or even ridiculous, as it *always* is and has been time for thinking. I agree. But phrasing this sentence, I nonetheless try to call for an extraordinary urgency, in so far as it is now, in our days, in light of the proclamation of the Anthropocene, that we have to revisit and recalibrate the ontological and ethical measures of notably modern Western thinking. I assume that the discourse of the Anthropocene marks a turning point in Western philosophy, as it challenges our basic vocabulary and conceptual framework, with which we describe, what we use to address as natural, societal and political processes. Where to enter into this discourse? –

Some 200 years ago, Hegel addressed the historicity of philosophical thinking. In the preface of his lectures on the *Philosophy of Right*, he states "As for the individual, everyone is a child of his time; so, philosophy too is its time apprehended in thoughts." (Hegel 2008, 14). A century later, Heidegger reinforced the rhetorical gist of this sentence, claiming that "philosophy has no mission to

take care of universal humanity and culture, to release coming generations once and for all from care about questioning, or to interfere with them simply through wrongheaded claims to validity. Philosophy is what it can be only as a philosophy of 'its time!'" (Heidegger 1999, 14) Both statements provide powerful testimonies, encouraging philosophers to engage with the needs of their times.

Hegel and Heidegger do not only recommend an engagement with the current situation as one possible philosophical topic among others. Rather, philosophy is nothing else than the attempt to read the signs of the times. Hence philosophy just *is* the name for a discourse on understanding one's situatedness in one's life time, its historical presence with its challenges and tasks, its processes and developments, its possibilities and risks. According to Hegel and Heidegger, this task just is what *thinking* is about (Heidegger 1972).

In these days it has become unusual – to say the least – to build an argument with possible political and historical consequences on the thinking of Hegel and Heidegger. Most scholars in the theoretical humanities including philosophy would claim that Hegel's *Geistphilosophie* as well as Heidegger's *Seinsdenken* are metaphysically overcharged and politically suspicious. We do not need master narratives that tend to neglect or even to suppress the varieties of organic life as well as the pluralities of socio-cultural life forms in the name of a teleological process, the logic of which is only open to the few, and these few typically being white males Europeans, who willingly or not perpetuate the biases of the Western heritage. And even when we disregard political worries for a second, the specialization of the sciences into ever more disciplines and subdisciplines, including the humanities and social sciences, barely supports an overarching vocabulary that would be able to support a stance from which the Hegelian agenda – reading the signature of our time – could be entertained.

Or so one thought. But then Nobel-prize laureate Paul Crutzen, an atmospheric chemist, proclaimed 'we are living in the Anthropocene'. In my view, this sentence is a philosophical claim in the sense of Hegel and Heidegger as circumscribed above. Crutzen, Stoermer, Steffens, Zalasiewicz and the scientific societies, panels, commissions and projects they and their colleagues represent, are

in fact putting forward a Hegelian statement, when declaring our time as the Anthropocene. They suggest that science is forced to interpret the current development of the key indicators of the functioning of the Earth system in a way that expresses the insight concerning these responses being driven by the ever-growing human imprint on the planet, thus announcing the emergence of the Anthropocene. As such, the term 'Anthropocene' does not refer to an object, a set of entities or to an identifiable event. That is why it is contested. Like the notion of the Holocene as the official denomination of the latest geological epoch, the term 'Anthropocene' provides an attempt to address the simultaneity of significant changes of the ecological system under one heading. We apprehend our times in thought, when claiming with Crutzen and others that we are living in the Anthropocene.

The thing called the Anthropocene

But then again, the gist of this sentence and its explanatory force does not rely in finally having found the correct classificatory entry for the current geological period. What does one refer to when stating that we are living in the Anthropocene? Apprehending our time as the Anthropocene means to articulate the all-pervasive signature or 'Stimmung' that shapes life on Earth as an ontological key. The concept of Anthropocene provides a name for a sort of planetary '*Befindlichkeit*' or attunement. Using this term (*Befindlichkeit*) of Heidegger's (Heidegger 1962), one might say that the planet find itself thrown in the Anthropocene. The sentence 'We are living in the Anthropocene' then does not only refer to a geological system of classification in a somehow neutral scientific description. It denotes what it is like being earthlings in our times. It expresses what Karl Jaspers (Jaspers 1933) called an 'epochal consciousness'. For humans and non-humans alike, existence is conditioned by human activities and anthropogenic impact on the environment. To many species and genera in organic life this being conditioned even implies their extinction. So the Anthropocene articulates what it is like being on planet Earth in a bio-geological epoch, which is

characterized by the atrocities of the metabolism of the human species and its effect on the eco-system.

The Anthropocene then is the name for the ultimate ontological frame of what there is. As such, as said before, the Anthropocene itself is neither an entity nor a set of objects or processes. It is the name for a general frame that enables us to see and understand entities, objects and processes in the first place. Understanding entities and events in light of the Anthropocene means to adopt a different kind of ontological frame that changes our understanding of what there is.

As the historian Dipesh Chakrabarty (2009) in a seminal paper has argued, the proclamation of the Anthropocene marks the event when Earth history and World history are declared to have become intertwined. Before that, we used to think of Earth history in geological time scales independent of the history of human civilisation. We used to take Earth history as providing so called natural conditions that organic life, including human life, in the process of evolution has to adjust to. Earth history had its catastrophes and episodes of mass extinctions of flora and fauna due to asteroid downfall or continental drift or climate change caused by deviations of solar activity. But we are now most likely witnessing another (the 6th) process of mass extinction; and all indicators are telling us that this process is caused by human activity. From a philosophical point of view, it doesn't matter, whether this 'now' is said to begin already with the mastery of fire by our hunter-gatherer ancestors, or with the agricultural revolution 10.000 years ago, or – following the Orbis Spike hypothesis – around 1610 as a result of European imperialism and the exchange of species (including smallpox and measles) across the oceans, or around 1800 with the steam engine and the industrial use of fossil energies, or around 1950 according to the so called 'Great Acceleration' (see Lewis and Maslin 2018 concerning the debates of the beginning of the Anthropocene). The important thing is that human activity ultimately has become a geological, an Earth-historical factor. The Anthropocene-thesis undermines the nature/culture-distinction in historical measures. It corrects the belief that Earth-history and World-history are referring to two different

ontological domains with independent time-scales. Human civilizations cannot be understood as unfolding itself on the basis of background conditions beyond human reach. Maybe most of us would wish it wasn't so. But we have to learn that the Earth-World-distinction belongs to the premature version of modern philosophical nihilism. Thus, matured by the tragedy of expansive planetary humanification, we now have to learn that we cannot distinguish any longer between planet Earth on the one hand and the World of human activity on the other. The drama of the Anthropocene gives the struggle between Earth and World, which Heidegger famously had located in the work of art, another twist (Heidegger 2002). It announces globalization to be not just a socio-economic *play*, but a planetary *epos* that shapes the way future earthlings will describe their habitat.

I repeat, the Anthropocene as such is not an experiential object or phenomenon. But reading the signs as part of a text entitled 'The Anthropocene' shapes the way those phenomena appear. The concept of the Anthropocene is hence a result of interpretation; it denotes what Claude Romano has termed a hermeneutical event (Romano 2009). This interpretation makes sense of various and heterogenous phenomena that in themselves already are complex entities and complex phenomena. Global warming, the loss of biodiversity, the rise of ocean sea levels, Western Imperialism, Eastern Imperialism, global capitalism, fossil energy companies, the traffic infrastructure, the entertainment industry, the food production industry --- all these phenomena and many more are facets of the Anthropocene. One might argue that the concept of the Anthropocene roughly covers what Ancient thinking thought of as human *hybris* and Christian metaphysics used to capture as *the evil* in all its guises. But I do not want to moralize or evaluate here. I just want to depict the ontological status of the concept of the Anthropocene. The Anthropocene is literally a meta-physical conception, an idea that transcends *physis* or nature. It is not an object, not even a hyper-object. It is the result of an interpretation, providing sense to a manifold of somehow connected complex phenomena. Due to its hermeneutic origin one might call it an idea, an idea that nevertheless proves to be more real than any of its phenomenal manifestations. The term 'idea' means that it provides the guiding and

comprehensive perspective – the ontological frame, as I said above, or the ontological key as *Befindlichkeit* – in which phenomena are seen and experienced.

The notion of the Anthropocene then refers to a phenomenal reality that in its totality withdraws from its givenness as an object, a set of objects or corresponding processes.

Anthropologist Jarrett Zigon (2018) has introduced the term 'situation' in order to grasp the ontological status of concepts like the Anthropocene. I want to borrow his emphasis on the situation for a while, as it highlights our being involved in what we use to think of as anonymous processes. Seeing our time in light of the Anthropocene then means to transform the geological, evolutionary as well as biographical timescales into the situational now of its urgency. We have a situation here – but there is no base in some extra-terrestrial Houston that could fix the situation and its problems for us. Understanding the Anthropocene as a situation means to acknowledge that its concept is geo-historical. It has a temporal as well as a topological impact, interpreting the current situation of what there is, of the cosmos of antiquity, the world of the moderns, the Earth of the geologists; only that the *now* as well as the *here* of its reference are bursting the limits of what we normally understand by a situation or situating concepts. Proclaiming the Anthropocene then means to transform the universe into a situation. And you have to note the singular of this formula: It means to acknowledge THE situation. There is only one.

Hence declaring the period, we happen to live in as the Anthropocene, is to historicize the cosmos. It demands to think in cosmological historical measures, in time spans and spatialities that go beyond our usual ontological framework or forms of intuitions of time and space, and yet it transforms a neutral geological period into a demanding geo-political situation. We have to rethink our ontological vocabulary in light of the event of the proclamation of the Anthropocene.

It shouldn't be necessary, but let me nonetheless underline that addressing the Anthropocene as an idea or a hyper-phenomenon, as something that is a non-object enabling the interpretation of certain processes and objects, does not mean to deny the reality and significance of human impact on the eco-system. It does

not mean to deny the loss of biodiversity, the toxification of air, soil, ocean- and freshwater, the exponential increase of the use of fossil fuels and human induced global warming. What is more, all this has already begun long before the notion of the Anthropocene was launched; decades or centuries, maybe even millennia ago. But comprehending all this under one name by simultaneously interpreting these signs and symptoms as phenomenal manifestations of a new geo-historical epoch transforms these processes into something different. They become parts of one event; they gain their meaning as being parts of a whole that was not available as such before its proclamation. The proclamation is the event; the proclamation of the Anthropocene.

I am putting some weight on this because the theoretical humanities in general and philosophy in particular are challenged on their very own domain, which is the domain housing the art of critique and interpretation. Only this time, Earth System Scientists have entered the scene, interpreting data and complex causal relations by projecting them towards an all-encompassing idea that as such cannot be proven or accounted for by the means of empirical sciences alone. They, not some academic philosopher with a Hegelian or Heideggerian background, have presented a master narrative under the name of the Anthropocene that ultimately suffices to address the importance or planetary urgency of the development at issue. This proclamation is an invitation and a gift to the humanities, as Latour (2014) has commented. As with all gifts, we – social scientists, researchers from the humanities – have to prove that we can live up to the pressure that this gift puts on us, whether we can cope with the responsibility implied to give again.

For these reasons, I think we better take the sentence 'we are living in the Anthropocene' to express the signature of our times. I do not know of a sentence with similar importance or significance. We better do our best in our efforts understanding it.

Who is this 'we'? – Grappling with posthumanism

But there it was again: 'we'. Whom do I refer to when I say that *we* better should do our best in our efforts understanding the sentence 'we are living in the

Anthropocene'? Is it all currently living human beings? Does it encompass non-human animals as well? What about waterfalls and i-phones?

Timothy Morton opens his book 'Humankind' (2017) with a reflection about the impossibility to find a proper pronoun to address what he calls 'the symbiotic real'. In particular, he ponders about the difficulties and pitfalls of using the first-person plural 'we':

Right now, in my part of the academy, I'm not allowed to like 'We are all Earthlings', that song by the Muppets, let alone sing it as if it were some kind of biospheric anthem. I'm supposed to condemn it as deeply white and Western, and so appropriative of indigenous cultures and blithely ignorant of racial and gender difference. I'm trying to make the academy a safe space in which to like 'We Are all Earthlings'. This boils down to thinking hard about the 'we'. (Morton 2017, 4f).

I agree with Morton on this one. I think we should bracket the otherwise recommendable post-colonial reservations towards the metaphysics of the 'we' for a moment in order to think hard about it and to reflect on its meaning and reference under conditions of the Anthropocene. Morton refers to what one may call the mainstream posthumanist paradigm in recent humanities that senses violence and suppression in any such white Western 'we'. From the point of view of posthumanism, referring to such a 'we' unavoidably installs the ontological, political and ethical basis for all sorts of chauvinism. 'We' seems to install a demarcation line between us and them, between humans vs. non-humans. From there the highway is opened up leading to traditional metaphysical humanism that used to be built on human exceptionalism.

In various guises posthumanist interventions rightly fight against metaphysical humanism. They do so along two different dimensions: against the human/nonhuman-distinction; and against the human/not-quite-human-anyway-distinction, making their case in the name of inter-species justice and intra-species justice respectively. Whereas the first distinction basically echoes the alleged superiority of the human species over and against other biological species, as traditionally maintained by Jewish-Christian religions and modern Western metaphysics, the second distinction fuels the historical chauvinisms based in race,

nationality, gender, sexuality, social class etc. A certain ideal type of humanity is set – male, white, free, creative, strong, catholic, protestant, blond, blue eyes etc. – and those who do not fit the list find themselves to be excluded from humanity proper, facing the violent and often lethal consequences of this logic of exclusion. Giorgio Agamben (2004) analysed the logic behind both dimensions in terms of the 'anthropological machine', that one way or the other generates superior humanity over and against the not-yet or not-anymore-human.

As to the first dimension, many scholars contest the monolithic unity of the human organism, recalling the fact that the body of mine that is right now writing this paper in fact is a sort of biological polis or symbiosis, containing millions of bacteria and viruses. It hence is not at all clear what the first-person singular pronoun 'I' really refers to. Cartesian dualists have an easy answer, as they consider the ego to express the *res cogitans*, the thinking substance, which is without extension and hence indivisible and one, not many. This 'I' has – somehow – a machinelike body and manifests itself in co-existence with its bodily mechanisms. But strictly speaking, it remains an unphilosophical manner of speaking if one refers to oneself by pointing at one's body. The true ego is the mind or the soul. In these days, Cartesianism serves as the scapegoat or main suspect responsible for many of the ideological pathologies in the development of Western culture, especially so because of its mechanistic and instrumentalist view of organic life that offers human exceptionalism the means to the ruthless exploitation of non-human life. But despite its bad reputation and its metaphysical inconsistencies, Cartesianism is not dead. In my view, certain tendencies in recent transhumanism seem to require a Cartesian dualist ontology. They presuppose the ontological possibility to isolate mental states from the organic body, for instance in mind-uploading techniques that seek to replace the organic body by Avatars or holograms (notoriously so endorsed by Kurzweil 2006).

Those of us who consider the body being an integral part of one's personal identity have to deal with the fact that the organism that I for instance believe to be does not represent an ontological unity in the strict sense. The body of mine is a microcosmos or microbiome. Maybe I should refer to myself rather using 'we' or

even 'they', as this would express the insight that the organism that I am referring to using the pronoun 'I' functions as a vehicle for millions of bacteria that inhabit this microbiome of mine/ours. The human/non-human distinction of traditional humanism is flawed then; there is nothing like human purified from non-human. We have to learn that the very concept of the human species only makes sense, in so far as the individual members of this species are understood as multispecies-conglomerations, as complex systems, the stability of which presupposes the smooth symbiotic collaboration of myriads of free-lance workers in the joint project of keeping this body alive and going. Pushing this thought a little further, one might hold that the sentence 'we are living in the Anthropocene' is hopelessly flawed, as it perpetuates the arrogance of Western humanism. Either we acknowledge the complexity of the multispecies symbiotic reference implied in any meaningful 'we' – then 'Anthropocene' is a misnomer. Or we ignore posthumanist biology and keep on using personal pronouns to refer to subjects and subjectivities – then we just continue the metaphysical violence inherent in metaphysical humanism.

Donna Haraway (Haraway 2008, 2016) argues along these lines, holding that the 'Anthropocene' can only be a boundary event, as the human age has proven to be a geological pathology that either leads to the catastrophic collapse of the ecosystem or at best prepares what Haraway calls the 'Chtulucene', named partly after chthonic ancient and modern Earth goddesses, as the opportunity for the surviving species to establish multispecies assemblages with refuge possibilities in an age of 'multi-species becoming-with'.

But does this mean that one cannot speak of human beings at all? Is the very category of the Anthropos metaphysically flawed? Is any reference to an 'ego' as the experiencing subject that assigns bodily states as belonging to the organism that is experienced *as its* lived body prohibited? Not at all. From the fact that my organism is an organized manifold of actually many organisms, a microcosmos, does not follow that this integrative manifold is prohibited from experiencing itself as a unity or union. This union can even experience moments of disintegration, in diseases when bacterial or viral intruders threaten the stability of the system. This

union can be called 'human' in contrast to other possible unions or microbioms that display different organizational patterns. Nothing of this presupposes an essentialism that would condition the correct use of the concept of the human to the distillation of some human essence over and against non-human essences. I can refer to myself as a human being without this reference implying the neglect or the suppression of my enteric flora or the evolutionary ontogenesis of my cellular structure in its continuity with other mammals or with all aerobic organisms. Already Plato thought of the human soul or character as a complex unity, imagining it in analogy to a political community with divergent and maybe even struggling parts that *nota bene* are organized according to the virtue of justice (and not power or suppression).

Who is this 'we'? – Recognizing the normative dimension

However, the issue at stake is not just one of metaphysics and the possibility of representing and referring to complex processual systems as ontological unities. It also and foremost is about the politics of distributing normative commitments and entitlements, their scope and legitimation, all of which is linked to conceptions of agency and responsibility. To put it into a rhetorical question: Which kind of assemblage is capable of speaking on behalf of the other-than-human, if not those whom we used to consider as human beings? At the end of the day it is us – some subset selection of the species of homo sapiens to be qualified further – who have to deal with the ethical and normative implications of the processes captured by the term Anthropocene. The current planetary situation displays the need to rethink our concepts of life and living in a way that is highly attentive to the ecological complexities that humans and non-humans alike are entangled in. But contemporary naturalism (including its posthumanist versions from Bennett over Haraway to Braidotti) fails to address the normative dimension in a way that would explain its ontological possibility. Where do we locate the addressees of normative commitments and entitlements? How can we account for the value of multispecies being-with? What are the conditions of possibility for an organism (or any other entity) to be responsive to norms and ethical values? In my view these questions

indicate that we cannot do with versions of 'flat' ontologies that confine themselves to disclosing ecological or symbiotic interdependencies. Understanding the sentence 'we are living in the Anthropocene' requests to deal with its implied normativity; and this means to place the inherent responsibility to something or somebody capable of acknowledging or responding to this claim of responsibility.

For that reason, I do not think that there is something wrong with the concept of the Anthropocene. It remains however an urgent task to come to terms with the concept of the Anthropos in light of an ontological concept of responsibility. I cannot elaborate on this topic in this paper, but will come back to this central issue with a remark further down.

What about the socio-political snares inherent in the appropriative 'we'? Some researchers prefer the term *Capitalocene* and argue that the prefix *anthropo-* obscures the specific economic and political relations that have driven the technological development of capitalism. Whether the paradigmatic example is the steam engine and the coal industry (Malm 2016) or the exploitation of "cheap" natural resources (Moore 2016), the central problem of climate change is not the human but the forces of capitalism (Angus 2016). According to this view, the category of the human naturalizes the problems of the Anthropocene by blaming humans as such rather than a specific economic system, thus letting capitalism 'off the hook'. In this perspective, global warming amplifies the global injustice that capitalism in the guise of imperialist colonialism has installed since the European conquerors appeared at the American, African and Australasian coasts. The economies and countries of the Global North are causally responsible for most of the carbon dioxide emissions that fuel global warming; it most likely will be the poor countries of the Global South which have to suffer most from the ecological consequences. In fact, they already do. In acknowledgement of this imbalance the Kyoto protocol from 1997 and the Paris agreement in 2016 use the formula of a 'principle of common but differentiated responsibilities', the Paris declaration adding 'and respective capabilities, in the light of different national circumstances.' This is a political statement in the sense that it will be up for future negotiations to distribute

obligations in correspondence to differentiating responsibilities, taking differences of capabilities and other national circumstances into account.

Dipesh Chakrabarty took this principle as his point of departure in his Tanner Lectures on Human Values in 2015 (Chakrabarty 2015). I want to follow his line of thought for a while, but will depart at the end, taking a different route that hopefully defends some sort of universalism. Chakrabarty's lectures try to establish a perspective from which the antinomy 'common but differentiated' can be understood in a way that avoids this formula to be squelched in the mill wheels of national economic or political interests. The very category of the Anthropos in the Anthropocene is hence disputable and needs clarification. He writes: "It must be of interest to scholars in the humanities that the word *human* has turned out to be one of the most contested and disputed categories of the social and political literature on climate change." (Chakrabarty 2015, 156)

The antinomy of the 'we'

Chakrabarty introduces two distinctions, namely the distinction between a '*homocentric*' and a '*zoocentric*' view of the world ('zoocentric' from the Greek *zoein*, to live, or *zoon*, living being), and the distinction between '*homo*' and '*anthropos*', the Latin and Greek words for human being respectively (Chakrabarty 2015, 147). Albeit philosophers like Heidegger, Carl Schmitt and Hans-Georg Gadamer as well as historians working with globalization and environmentalists at the end of the last century were about to understand the truly global significance of European expansion, of capitalism and the distribution of modern technology, they end up remaining homocentric; "Humans were at the center of this narrative, however it was told" (Chakrabarty 2015, 152). But beginning with the enormous effect of the most famous copy of nature photography ever published, namely 'Earth Rise', taken by Apollo commander William Anders on Christmas Eve 1968, the *zoocentric* view on the World began to take shape, according to Chakrabarty. This view concerns about Earth and the Earth system as the habitat for all life as such, introducing the maybe faint idea that climate change cannot be dealt with on the basis of the means and routines of existing economic and political institutions, as

these are developed to support 'ordinary human flourishing'. 'Earth Rise' triggers or exhibits what I have called the attunement of the Anthropocene. Those who respond to this photograph *zoocentrically* share epochal consciousness in the sense of Jaspers, sensing the appeal or the request that comes along with the aesthetic reception of the picture to care for the planet as such.

The distinction of *Anthropos* and *homo* is drawn along similar lines. Whereas *homo* stands for 'humanity as a divided political subject', *Anthropos* covers 'collective and unintended forms of existence of the human, as a geological force, as a species, as a part of the history of life on this planet'. *Anthropos* then is a causal and descriptive category. In that sense, talking about anthropogenic climate change indicates where the current process of climate change differs from earlier instances of rapid climate change in Earth history. As such, *Anthropos* it is a Saussurean marker of difference; "it is a causal term that does not signify any moral culpability" (157). *Homo* on the other side reflects the ethical and the political aspect of the human factor implied in the Anthropocene. It is the aspect that worries about coming famines due to global warming, the water crisis in Cape Town South Africa, poverty in India and elsewhere. This then is the deadlock as we have to be both, zoocentric *Anthropos* and homocentric humans. In the words Chakrabarty:

But who is that 'we'? We are simultaneously a divided homocentric humanity, and a dominant species and thus a part of the history of life on this planet. [...] With this collapsing of multiple chronologies – of species history and geological times into our very own lifetimes, within living memory – the human condition has changed. (Chakrabarty 2015, 180)

I think Chakrabarty is right. Proclaiming the Anthropocene means acknowledging that the human condition has changed. And I suspect that this change goes into the opposite direction of what posthumanism has taught us, as it implies to focus once again on humankind and the historical significance of human, including Western civilization. However, this assessment does not mean to fall back into Western rationalism and its metaphysical humanism. Rather, we find ourselves confronted with a situation similar to what Kant had envisaged as the antinomy of pure reason. An antinomy in the sense of Kant expresses a

contradiction of two prima facie mutual contradicting statements – a thesis and its antithesis – that both seem to can be proved (Kant 1930, B 448 ff.). As philosophy subscribes to the logical principle of non-contradiction, we cannot endorse both sentences at the same time, which is why Kant scrutinizes the ontological difference that is inherent in the two statements, so that they in fact are not referring to the same object (or so that they in fact are not in logical contradiction, but exhibiting subcontrary oppositions). So, the antinomy I see is the following:

Thesis: *There is no 'we humans', as there is no human essence. Humankind is distributed pluralistic, as it has been shown by various post-enlightenment conceptions endorsing cultural or historical relativism. What is more, as the brutal history of especially Western so-called civilization has proven, any effort to defend 'The Human' suppresses and violates illegitimately the manifold of human life forms.*

Anti-thesis: *There is and must be some ontological underpinning that supports the meaning of the phrase 'we humans'. The situation called 'The Anthropocene' addresses the human as such. The urgency of the current crisis of the Earth system requests to take this situation as a common responsibility that allows and maybe presupposes the possibility of 'we humans' or 'us qua being human'.*

Clearly Chakrabarty highlights the significance of the Antithesis. According to Chakrabarty, living memory is just not any longer linked to a family's or a generation's or a certain group's life-time. Species history and geological time have entered into the experiential horizon of current living humans and non-humans alike. Chakrabarty hopes that "the crisis of climate change, by throwing us into the inhuman timelines of life and geology, also takes us away from the homocentrism that divides us." (Chakrabarty 2015, 183)

So far, I agree with Chakrabarty. But I think we have to introduce another distinction in order to account for the Anthropos. Piling up the evidence for anthropogenic causality as the main factor to the current crisis is not sufficient in order to argue for the commonality of 'we humans'. It doesn't counter posthumanist worries either. I want to start at a different angle. I want to go back once again to Heidegger's anti-essentialist notion of 'Dasein'. To my purpose we don't need to subscribe to the agenda of *Being and Time* as such. We just need to

keep in mind that 'Dasein' is not a biological nor a social category. It is a formal denominator for a life form that is qualified by entertaining its being in a way that this very being is an issue for it. "Dasein ist ein Seiendes, das nicht nur unter anderem Seienden vorkommt. Es ist vielmehr dadurch ontisch ausgezeichnet, daß es diesem Seienden in seinem Sein *um* sein Sein selbst geht", Heidegger famously stated (Heidegger 1979, 12.). Surely Heidegger thought that the category of Dasein happens to be co-extensive with the category of human beings; and Heidegger uses these terms elsewhere if not interchangeably, then with the same reference. But it nonetheless in principle remains conceivable that there might be members of other species, organic or silicon based, able to perform *Dasein*. I am inclined to think of 'responsibility' in a similar manner. I want to suggest thinking of human beings as responsible beings. And I want to argue that 'we humans' happens to be co-extensive with the phrase 'we responsables'.

I draw here on an account in the post-Heideggerian tradition of Hans Jonas, Jean-Luc Nancy and notably Bernhard Waldenfels. In this perspective, the proclamation of the Anthropocene is not primarily a claim about the causal trajectories that in all its complexities can be reduced to a single cause as the trigger of global warming and other catastrophic phenomena appearing in our current situation. It does however change the human condition, as Chakrabarty has said. It changes what it means to be human as it now, with the proclamation of the Anthropocene, primarily means to be a responsive, a responsible being.

What I mean is the following: The event of the proclamation of the Anthropocene joins human beings as the addressees of a request that humans have to respond to. This 'have to' is taken to be as a pre-normative or maybe existential commitment. It might help to think of the etymology of the word 'responsibility' here. Somebody responsible means somebody who is able to respond. So we have to think of responsibility as response-ability. The real event of the proclamation of the Anthropocene is the proclamation by the Anthropocene to the Anthropos, to the human beings as the one's being able to respond to this claim. Those addressed by the Anthropocene are 'we humans'. 'We humans' hence does not refer to those exhibiting the essence of humanity in any biological or metaphysical sense. There

is no human essence. 'We humans' renders a nominalist expression covering those who are addressed by the proclamation of the Anthropocene. As I said earlier, the Anthropocene-thesis is highly reflexive; it is a claim put forward by humans about humans addressing humans. It thus performs an illocutionary act that occasionally determines and joins those who are able to respond, thus being subsumed under the category of the Anthropos. I cannot but sense a Hegelian element here as well: maybe the proclamation of the Anthropocene is the proclamation of the Anthropocene made by the Anthropocene to the Anthropos. As long as non-human people or other-than-humans cannot be committed to respond, we humans have to do the job in and as the community of absolute responsibility. Solidarity with non-human people presupposes the ability to respond on their behalf.

So, the Anthropocene refurbishes humanism. Instead of rationality, freedom, power or technological creativity, humanism 2.0 might be built upon responsibility. Common but differentiated. But responsibility still.

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