CHAPTER NINE

The (Non)Problem of Historicism

This chapter takes up the analysis of historical diversity again, but in a slightly different vein. Up to this point, the arguments examined have orbited around clearly identifiable historical phenomena—the forms of power in modern social formations, the heterogeneity of the working class, the forms of agency in colonial India. The basic challenge has been to show that Enlightenment theories, particularly Marxism, are capable of apprehending how these phenomena play out in both West and East. But now, rather than engage the problem of universalism and Eurocentrism through specific empirical or historical challenges, I tackle it at a conceptual level, by taking up the arguments developed by Dipesh Chakrabarty in his hugely influential recent book, Provincializing Europe. After Ranajit Guha’s Elementary Aspects, this is perhaps the most prominent work in the Subalternist oeuvre, certainly the most important since their turn toward postmodern themes. It is in this book that Chakrabarty offers the most far-reaching objections of any postcolonial theorist to the abstract, universalizing categories of Enlightenment theories. As usual, it is Marxism that bears the brunt of his critique, but he clearly intends to question the broader European inheritance.

The main issues to be addressed in this chapter are Chakrabarty’s analysis of the abstract categories of political economy, which he cashes out through his distinction between History 1 and History 2, and his critique of “historicism,” which he presents as one of the two main contributions of Provincializing Europe. I place the term in scare quotes because Chakrabarty’s understanding of the concept of historicism is unconventional, and in fact, unravelling just what he means by it is no small challenge. The two issues—abstraction and historicism—are closely related in Chakrabarty’s argument, and comprise the heart of his case against the Western canon. I will show that while the distinction he generates between the Two Histories is valid, the conclusions he tries to derive from it are not. I then show that once we reject his conclusions about historical difference and abstraction, his critique of historicism also collapses. Indeed, I will argue that there is no problem of “historicism” at all—as he defines the concept.

1 The other contribution of Dipesh Chakrabarty’s Provincializing Europe (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2000), according to the author himself, is the analysis of power, which I have examined in chap. 5 above. Henceforth, Provincializing Europe is cited as PE.
9.1 WHAT IS AT STAKE

In the arguments we have examined so far, Subalternist theorists have rejected universalizing theories on the grounds that capitalism outside the West has had a fundamentally different trajectory than it had in the West. Among the claims we encountered, and rebutted, have been that the Eastern bourgeoisie was not revolutionary, the way the Europeans had been; that it failed to implant liberal institutions; that it continued to rely on political coercion and hence failed to generate "bourgeois" forms of power; that peasants in the East are not motivated by material interests; that workers are innately religious; and so forth. Because of these deep fissures between East and West, the theories emerging from the Western experience are deemed problematic, inasmuch as they assume that the logic of social reproduction in the East is more or less akin to that in the West. But because it is not, assert the Subalternists, because the social and economic institutions rest on such different psychologies and power relations from those in the West, Western theories end up obscuring the real dynamics of Eastern modernity. With regard to the arguments encountered thus far, this is the source of Subalternists' rejection of the Enlightenment tradition in Western thought.

In Provincializing Europe, Chakrabarty introduces a second kind of objection. Instead of invoking the distinctiveness of the East in order to raise doubts, he points to some fundamental problems with the process of abstraction itself. Whenever we try to categorize any local practice as a specific instance of a "grand narrative," he asserts, intractable dilemmas arise. This is nowhere more evident than in the Marxist analysis of capitalism. Marxist theory operates at a high level of generality. It is an abstract theory, built to travel, its relevance supposedly extending to any part of the globe where capitalism has taken root. As economic reproduction becomes subject to capitalist imperatives, its logic is supposed to be explicable through the universalizing categories of political economy, whether the location is Birmingham, Detroit, Bombay, or Shanghai. Local history, Chakrabarty avers, becomes subsumed into the history of capital. The local becomes a specific instance of a more general kind of process—Bombay textile mills are no less an instance of capitalist processes than are the mills of Lancashire. This is how the abstract theory is seen as relevant to capitalist processes, no matter where they occur.

Chakrabarty raises fundamental objections to this mode of theorizing.

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2 Of course, he also relies on the putative divergence between Western and Eastern modernity, as we have seen. The argument from divergent modernity is evident in his critique of the Marxist theory of power, examined in chap. 5 above, and in his account of working-class identity, examined in chap. 8. Now, however, we are considering another line of argument developed by him.
Early in *Provincializing Europe*, he lays out the conventional understanding of capitalist development, as he sees it, along with his objections to it. The passage encapsulates well his motivation for developing an alternative. The dominant approaches to capitalist development, he says, share certain assumptions about its basic properties:

They all share a tendency to think of capital in the image of a *unity* that arises in one part of the world at a particular period and then develops globally over time, encountering and negotiating historical differences in the process. Or even when “capital” is ascribed a “global,” as distinct from a European, beginning, it is still seen in terms of the Hegelian idea of a *totalizing unity*—howsoever internally differentiated—that undergoes a process of *development* in historical time.3

Notice that Chakrabarty raises the issue of capital's geographical origins but does not see that as a central problem. The problem with conventional theories is not that they locate capitalism's birth in Europe.4 Rather, the basic issue is how they understand its *spread*, or universalization, wherever it might have originated. Conventional views about capitalism's universalization have two components that disturb Chakrabarty: first, that capital itself is viewed as a unity, an organic whole whose various parts are bound together; and second, that it is viewed as developing over time through predetermined stages, toward a predicted end point. Both components of the dominant approaches, he says, end up erasing historical difference. To illustrate this point, he follows up the passage just quoted with a jab at the British historian E. P. Thompson. He recalls how Thompson famously predicted that capitalism would spread into the Third World, compelling workers, as it spread, to submit to the requirements of its labor process. Chakrabarty urges us to reject Thompson's view. The assumption that capitalism will spread into the world, forcing agents to submit to its logic, says Chakrabarty, sees capitalism as a force that encounters historical difference, but sees it as something external to its own structure. A struggle ensues in this encounter, in the course of which capital eventually cancels out or neutralizes the contingent differences between specific histories. Through however torturous a process, it converts those historical specificities into historically diverse *vehicles* for the spread of its own logic. This logic is seen not only as single and homogenous, but also as one that

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3 *PE* 47. Emphasis added.
4 Chakrabarty is not insisting that it is Eurocentric to locate the origins of capitalism in Europe. In this regard, his argument diverges from those of other critics, such as James Blaut, who deny that capitalism was European in origin and thus insist that any theory claiming otherwise is Eurocentric. See J. M. Blaut, *The Colonizer's Model of the World: Geographic Diffusionism and Eurocentric History* (New York: Guilford Press, 1993).
unfolds over (historical) time, so that one can indeed produce a narrative of a putatively single capitalism in the familiar "history of" genre.\\(^5\)

This is a plea for recognizing the role of contingency and local particularities, and an accusation that universalizing theories become blind to the local, and to the myriad ways in which agents deviate from the logic of capitalism. What Chakrabarty sees as problematic about approaches such as Thompson's, which is to say Marxist approaches, is that while they recognize historical difference, they either view it as a temporary condition or dissolve its specificity into the unified logic of capital. Either way, capitalism is assumed, by Marxists, to have the power to subordinate other social practices to its own logic. This assumption makes Marxists view capitalism as an ineluctable force, which "cancels out" all differences between local histories as it subsumes them under its own logic.\\(^6\)

They just become instances of a more global process, the universal history of capital. They are folded into the "history of" something or other—in this case, the global history of capitalism.

Chakrabarty seeks to defend the local against the universal story of capital. His complaint against Marxism is that it is insufficiently attentive to the particularities of the local. Marxists ignore the contingencies that such particularities import into historical development, the way they resist being incorporated into the "grand narrative." He wants the East to have a history of its own. Certainly this history will make reference to capitalism, for Chakrabarty does not wish to deny the latter's historical relevance. But it will not lose sight of the innumerable ways in which the local retains its specificity—and this is precisely what Marxism and other universalizing theories ignore.

Readers will notice that we find ourselves back at the topic of capital's universalization. Like Ranajit Guha, Chakrabarty wishes to defend the specificity of the East. Like Guha and Chatterjee, he does so by denying the applicability of Western theory's universalizing categories. And finally, like so many other postcolonial theorists, he does so by denying that capital successfully universalizes. The present chapter will examine just how Chakrabarty goes about deploying his argument, which is different from any we have encountered thus far. In the next section, I present it in some detail. This is the longest and perhaps the most demanding chapter in this book. Chakrabarty's argument is a complicated one, and addressing it properly requires some space. So it might be useful to offer a brutally condensed summation of what is to come.

Chakrabarty's core argument is that the properties of capitalism that are regarded as having been universalized, and that the categories of political

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5  *PE* 48. Emphasis added.
economy are supposed to describe, are not in fact ever really universalized. If the underlying process of universalization is incomplete, then the abstract categories of political economy artificially impose an inaccurate, and hence misleading, description of local practices. Something that is in fact a hybrid social form, in which capitalist elements are forced into a compromise with noncapitalist forms, is illicitly turned into a pure, unalloyed instance of capitalism.

When abstract theories misdescribe local practices in this way, it is not just that the specificity of the local is obscured. The causal dynamics are also misrepresented, since certain practices are taken to have fully and successfully universalized, whereas in fact they failed to do so. This imparts to them a stability, and an internal coherence, which they actually lack. Because of this, the reliance on abstract political economy generates two kinds of errors. First, it views societies as driven by certain logics—of accumulation, of maturation through identifiable stages, of growth and then decline—that they do not in fact have. In so doing, it makes incorrect predictions about them, attributing to them a future that is false. Second, it imbues these societies with an internal coherence that is also misplaced. Social relations are assumed to be bound together by the same causal forces, in a kind of functionalist logic. Whereas the first of the two mistakes leads to a kind of developmental teleology, the second generates an unwarranted essentialism. What both mistakes have in common is that they impose an artificial closure on the contingencies of real history. As we will see, this worry about artificial closure is central to Chakrabarty's critique of historicism.

In the next section, I will offer a more detailed explication of Chakrabarty's worries. I will then show that they rest on some subtle but basic confusions about how abstraction works and how it is connected to historical analysis.

9.2 The Two Histories of Capital

The core problem with which we have been grappling in this book is how the history of the non-West has been affected by the incursion of capitalism. Marxism is known for claiming that once capitalism becomes the organizing principle in a social formation, its historical development is centrally shaped by capitalist imperatives. The particulars of this argument vary. For some Marxists, the regulating principle becomes class struggle between labor and capital; for others, it becomes the "laws of motion" specific to accumulation; for still others, it becomes the global dynamic of the world economy. But what is common to all of them is the idea that local history becomes subject to the same forces as histories in other parts of the capitalist world. The history of modern India, or Nigeria, or Argentina, becomes part of "capitalist history." This is what it means for capitalism to have universalized. The analytical complement to this process
is an increasing need for a conceptual frame adequate to its study. As the economic system spreads around the globe, bringing disparate regions under its sway, the categories that political economy generates to analyze its dynamics also become the lens through which we apprehend those regional histories. As Partha Chatterjee explains,

If there is one great moment that turns the provincial thought of Europe to universal philosophy, the parochial history of Europe to universal history, it is the moment of capital—capital that is global in its territorial reach and universal in its conceptual domain. It is the narrative of capital that can turn the violence of mercantile trade, war, genocide, conquest and colonialism into a story of universal progress, development, modernization, and freedom.7

This notion of universal history is exactly what disturbs postcolonial theorists. They offer two objections to the universalizing mode of thinking described in the previous paragraph. One is that the basic idea of capitalism’s having transformed regional dynamics along particular lines is mistaken; in the East, the putative transformation did not come about, because capitalism abandoned its universalizing mission once it reached Eastern shores. This is the argument I have examined, and rejected, in this book so far. I have shown that all the phenomena that Subalternist theorists adduce as symptoms of capitalism’s failure are in fact quite consistent with its success. So there is every reason to believe that the capitalism of the East is basically the same as that of the West.

The second objection is the one that we will take up in this chapter, for it is what Dipesh Chakrabarty develops in Provincializing Europe. It is that the very idea of describing the dynamics of the East as “capitalist history” is deeply misleading, if not mistaken. To motivate this argument, Chakrabarty first makes a distinction between two different ways in which capitalism absorbs, and interacts with, existing institutions as it matures and extends its influence. He then draws out the implications of this differential absorption. This argument is somewhat more involved than others we have encountered in this book. I will therefore present it as distinct theses, and then address them seriatim.

HISTORY 1 AND HISTORY 2: INTRODUCING THE DISTINCTION
To understand how capital affects historical development, declares Chakrabarty, it is necessary to distinguish two different ways in which it absorbs existing institutions. Suppose that a region is, at some initial point, not yet capitalist. Then, whether through colonialism or some other conduit, it is gradually transformed along capitalist lines. This will result in the transformation of local

structures and local institutions to make them adequate to the demands of capi-
tal accumulation. These institutions now contribute to capitalist production,
and are in turn reproduced by it. However, not all institutions contribute to the
system's viability in the same way. Some contribute to capitalist stability in a way
that is more determinative than others. Chakrabarty leans on some rather thick
Hegelian terminology here, without defining what he intends for it to convey.
But he is clearly pointing to the fact that some structures and institutions within
capitalism occupy a central place in its reproduction. He refers to them as part
of the "life process" of capitalism. He also describes them as being "posited" by
capital, which suggests that they not only constitute part of the system's essen-
tial conditions of reproduction but are themselves constrained by its architecture
in some way. The history of these institutions is thus absorbed into, and becomes
part of, what is encompassed by "capitalist history." This Chakrabarty describes
as History 1, observing that "[t]his is the universal and necessary history we
associate with capital." So, for Chakrabarty, it is not that the universalizing
categories of political economy are irrelevant. Clearly they have some purchase.
They reflect the social institutions that have become intrinsically connected to
the reproduction of capitalism. These are the institutions that become part of
capitalism's "life process."

He then distinguishes a second kind of history, which results from a very
different pattern of institutional absorption. This he calls History 2. It, too, is a
history associated with capitalism. The institutions, social practices and social
relations particular to it have been incorporated into the orbit of the capitalist
system, and thus it should not be understood as being external to capitalism.
However, even though these social relations come under capitalism's sway, they
do so "not as antecedents established by itself, not as forms of its own life-
process." So, while History 1 contributes to capital's life process, History 2
does not.

What does this mean? Chakrabarty explains that "to say that something
does not belong to capital's life-process is to claim that it does not contribute to
the self-reproduction of capital." Again and again he returns to this character-
istic of History 2: that it is independent of the reproductive logic of capital and
thereby does not form part of its "life process." In his words, "nothing in it is
automatically aligned with the logic of capital"; practices labeled History 2 "do
not lend themselves to the logic of reproduction of capital." What these
formulations suggest is that the reproduction of the institutions in History 2
will certainly be affected in some way by capital, since they have been absorbed
into the system, but their reproduction will not be subordinated to capitalism's

8 PE 63.
9 PE 63.
10 PE 63-4.
11 PE 67.
logic. So, while History 1 is part of the universal history of capital, History 2 will not be.

Clearly, one axis on which to differentiate the two Histories is their relation to the reproduction of capitalism. But Chakrabarty is also introducing a second difference between them. He often describes History 1 as encompassing not just capital and its universalizing drive, but other universalizing categories of Enlightenment thought. His list includes citizenship, nationalism, industrialization, and of course, Reason, all of which come under the rubric of History 1, inasmuch as they represent Enlightenment universals. Conversely, History 2 is identified with the local, the particular—those elements that cannot be easily assimilated into the categories associated with History 1. Whereas the abstract categories associated with History 1 impose a uniform analytical grid on social topography, History 2 resists being assimilated into it. Hence, what slots a practice into History 2 is not just that it does not contribute to capital's life process but that it also cannot be seen as an instance of some abstract category typical of Western theories.

The distinction Chakrabarty makes is not new, even if his somewhat infelicitous terminology might be. He derives much of its substance from Marx, and it has been made by many other neo-Marxists in the twentieth century. It is the simple observation that some kinds of practices are central to capitalism's reproduction (History 1), while others are not (History 2). If his argument went no deeper, it would not do much to puncture the universalizing ambitions of Marxist theory, for the distinction has been upheld, and even insisted upon, by some rather brazen universalizers. And I, too, will defend it in the course of this chapter, even while contesting the conclusions Chakrabarty derives from it. The twist in his argument comes not from the distinction itself, but from the particular role he attributes to History 2.

12 See *PE* 23, 67, 250.
13 That Marx makes this distinction is indisputable. But the particular passages from which Chakrabarty claims to have extracted it, from the Addenda to vol. III of the *Theories of Surplus Value*, do not much support the further points that Chakrabarty claims to derive from them. Marx's concern in these passages is simple—he wishes to argue that capitalism's development requires that practices which were preconditions for its emergence, and hence, by definition, had to be in place for it to take root, become subordinated to its logic as it consolidates itself. Hence, even though money and interest precede capitalism, they are subordinated to it once it has taken hold of their functions. Formerly its antecedents, now they are "posited" by it. The Hegelian language notwithstanding, it is a very simple argument, directed at a very basic point. The idea is that what was once independent of capital increasingly becomes subject to its logic. There is nothing in those passages about the obduracy of History 2, or its function being to disrupt the logic of History 1. All this is what Chakrabarty imports into the passages, in a rather tortured reading of them. Readers should especially compare Chakrabarty's reading of the passages on p. 468 of *Theories of Surplus Value*, vol. III (Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1971) with what Marx actually says.
HISTORY 2 DISRUPTS UNIVERSALIZATION

The practices included in History 2 have their own logic of reproduction, distinct from that of History 1. While History 1 represents the universal, abstract logic of capital, History 2 embodies the "diverse ways of being" rooted in the particular cultures of any given region of the globe. As capital spreads across the world, it faces the challenge of subordinating these various practices to its own dynamic. Chakrabarty describes this as "a question of transition/translation from many and possibly incommensurable temporalities to the homogenous time of abstract labor." But this process of translation is never complete. Agents manage to retain aspects of their culture, their practical orientations, which are independent of capital. Hence, even while History 2 is dominated by capital, it retains its own integrity. As we observed in the preceding section, the two Histories are permanent features of capitalism's unfolding dynamic.

The fact that History 2 retains its autonomy gives it a special place in the modern era. It bears the distinction of being the "category charged with the function of constantly interrupting the totalizing thrust of History 1." To interrupt the totalizing thrust of capitalism in this fashion is to undermine its universalization. Chakrabarty draws a portentous conclusion from this premise:

No historic form of capital, however global in its reach, can ever be a universal. No global, or even local for that matter, capital can ever represent the universal logic of capital, for any historically available form of capital is a provisional compromise made up of History 1 modified by somebody's History 2.

For Chakrabarty, this means that capital's globalization should not be confused with its universalization:

[The] globalization of capital is not the same as capital's universalization. Globalization does not mean that History 1, the universal and necessary logic of capital so essential to Marx's critique, has been realized. What interrupts and defers capital's self-realization are the various History 2s that always modify History 1 and thus act as grounds for claiming historical difference.

In other words, capital may spread to all corners of the world, but this does not mean that it manages to subordinate all social relations to its particular rules of reproduction. This, for Chakrabarty, means that it fails in its universalization. Notice that Chakrabarty has reached the same conclusion as Guha, which Chakrabarty has endorsed in other contexts—that capital in the modern era

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14 PE 92, 95.
15 PE 66.
16 PE 70.
17 PE 71; emphasis added.
failed to universalize itself. But in this instance his reasoning is different. For Guha, what derailed the universalization process was that capital abandoned its mission when it reached the colonies: capital failed to universalize because it changed its own nature. Chakrabarty's argument in the preceding paragraph, on the other hand, proposes that what undermines universalization is not that capital transmutes into a different species but that it is never able to expunge History 2. Capital's internal drive remains the same—it is just that the force of this drive turns out to be limited.

THE ANTAGONISM BETWEEN HISTORY 1 AND HISTORY 2
The fact that History 2 retains its own logic of reproduction, that it does not conform to capital's dictates, carries another implication for Chakrabarty. If there exist practices that do not bend to capitalism's logic, they also carry the potential to disrupt its reproduction. With History 2, capital has to encounter in the reproduction of its own life process relationships that present it with double possibilities. These relations could be central to capital's self-reproduction, and yet it is also possible for them to be oriented to structures that do not contribute to such reproduction.18

If social relations are not guided by capitalist imperatives, agents embedded within them may have priorities that are inimical to the system. Work habits may not adjust to competitive demands; social priorities may not serve the requirements of accumulation; norms of comportment may not adjust to bourgeois authority relations. When social relations become absorbed into capital's self-reproduction, they become part of History 1 and thus functionally compatible with it. But if they remain in History 2, they are not only independent of capital but, by being independent of it, pose the threat of disruption. It is critical to register this component of Chakrabarty's argument: the very fact that History 2 is not aligned to the logic of capital makes it a threat to capital. And because of this threat, Chakrabarty concludes, "History 1 . . . has to subjugate or destroy the multiple possibilities that belong to History 2."19

One example of this is the factory, where the "disciplinary process . . . is in part meant to accomplish the subjugation/destruction of History 2."20 Workers come to the factory with some inclination to accept capital's dictates. They have this inclination because submitting to capitalists is their only means of survival. In this respect, they become part of capital's universal history, History 1. But they also come immersed in their local culture, local work habits, their

18 PE 64.
19 PE 65.
20 PE 67.
individual preferences and proclivities. These have been formed independent of capital, and are what the latter sees as potentially disruptive. As a result, they have to be destroyed in order to turn the worker into a replaceable, abstract provider of labor power, into “sheer, living labor—muscular energy plus consciousness.”21 The labor process, for Chakrabarty, is an arena where History 1 wages its campaign for the “subjugation/destruction” of History 2. It is designed to obliterate all those particularities of local culture, all those ways of being that do not conform to the universal logic of capital and that obstruct the transformation of actual historical workers into “abstract labor.”

**THE OBDURACY OF HISTORY 2**

History 1 is forever striving to obliterate History 2. The problem is that, try as it might to bend all social relations to its own logic of reproduction, History 1—or capital, which is its agent—fails in its effort. Having said that History 1 must “subjugate or destroy” History 2, Chakrabarty follows it up immediately afterward by saying, “There is nothing, however, to guarantee that the subordination of History 2 to the logic of capital would ever be complete.”23 Capital has to learn to live with the incompleteness of its rule. It must coexist with History 2 and with the persistence of institutions and practices that do not align with its reproductive logic. History 2, in turn, is never able to break free of capital, because it comprises practices that have come under capital’s domination. But even while they cannot wrest free of it, they are never fully absorbed by it either. Their fate is to remain under its shadow even while constantly frustrating its “totalizing” thrust.24

The dynamic between the two histories plays a central role in Chakrabarty’s theory of global modernity and also forms the foundation for his critique of Enlightenment theories, especially the Marxist tradition. For him, the fatal flaw in the Enlightenment tradition is that, while it is alive to the role of History 1, it consistently fails to register the impact of History 2, especially in the non-West. This results in a universalizing discourse that ignores contingency and local particularities, downplays the role of agency, and imposes an unwarranted teleology on historical development. All these flaws come under the rubric of historicism. Chakrabarty views the critique of historicism as one of the two central contributions of *Provincializing Europe*, and it is to this concept that we now turn.

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21 Ibid.
22 The practices associated with History 1 are not confined to the simple act of labor. They include other universalisms associated with modern capitalism. Two examples of this that Chakrabarty provides are unionization and citizenship. Workers who join the ranks of citizens and trade unionists become part of the narrative of capital (PE 67). Both institutions are products of the modern era, both part of the cultural transformation that came about with the rule of capital. They are accompaniments to the universalization of capital.
23 PE 65.
24 PE 254.
9.3 THE PROBLEM OF HISTORICISM

While Chakrabarty makes clear that historicism is a form of reasoning that ought to be avoided, just what the concept denotes precisely is not easy to glean. This is owing, in part, to Chakrabarty's self-indulgent style of theorizing, whereby the search for ever more abstruse formulations often overtakes any discernible interest in communication. But it also is owing to some genuine confusion in Chakrabarty's presentation of the concept. In what follows, I have chosen to present the strongest, most defensible interpretation of the concept.

Let us begin by introducing Chakrabarty's own summary statement of it, which is also one of his less obscure renderings. He describes it as "a mode of thinking about history in which one assumed that any object under investigation retained a unity of conception throughout its existence and attained full expression through a process of development in secular, historical time." Or again, "it tells us that in order to understand the nature of anything in this world we must see it as an historically developing entity, that is, first, as an individual and unique whole—as some kind of unity at least in potential—and second, as something that develops over time." The italicized phrases encapsulate the two elements that comprise historicism's core. The first is an assumption that the parts that comprise a social whole are in a relation of functional interdependence. They cohere or hang together in such a way that their constituent parts develop in synchrony. This assumption rules out the possibility of ruptures, instability, or tensions between parts of a social whole. The second element is the idea that social complexes develop ineluctably through time toward a predestined end—a notion that makes history seem to be something "merely waiting to become actual—like the possibility of ripening inherent in a fruit."

What induces historicists to treat social complexes as if they were functionally integrated wholes, maturing through time like the ripening of a fruit, is that they are in the thrall of History 1. Once theorists forget about all the diverse
modes of interaction, all the different ways of being, that continue to persist within capitalism, then capitalism increasingly takes the appearance of an all-pervasive force. It becomes a unifying principle of social development, which erases any hint of a future that does not conform to capital's logic. The future increasingly becomes a knowable entity, drawing toward a determinable end. Chakrabarty calls this the future "that 'will be,'" by which he means a future that has to be, that has to take a predicted course. This is the future toward which we seem to be plummeting headlong, once we view society through the prism of History 1:

This is a future of which we know at least the constitutive principles, even if we do not have a blueprint for it. Let us call this the future that "will be" . . . The future that "will be" aligns itself with what I called History 1 in my chapter on the "The Two Histories of Capital" [i.e., the preceding section]. This is the universal and necessary history posited by the logic of capital. In this history inhere the Enlightenment universals.30

So the slide into historicism comes when we substitute History 1 for the diversity and contingency of real history. Hence, "[to] critique historicism in all its varieties is to unlearn to think of history as a developmental process in which that which is possible becomes actual by tending to a future that is singular."31 Here we see the connections between History 1, historicism, and what appears to be a historical teleology.32 Once it is accepted that social wholes are subjected to the unifying force of capital, it erases any sense of a plural, open-ended future; the future becomes whittled down to a singular, determinable end point.

A second consequence of historicism, issuing from the same source, is that social institutions are assumed to be seamlessly woven into an organic whole. What Chakrabarty seems to mean by this is that historicists assume a kind of functional compatibility among all the diverse elements of society. They assume away contradiction, instability, incompatibility, and so on. It is easy to see how this, too, relates to the suffocating hold of History 1 on our imaginations. Recall that the function of History 2 is always to frustrate the "totalizing thrust" of History 1. This means that there are always some institutions, or practices, that remain stubbornly independent of capital, or of whatever universalizing principle the historicist happens to fix upon. Because these practices retain their independence, they exercise their own influence on social reproduction, at times even destabilizing it. Certain practices or norms of comportment resist

30 PE 250.
31 PE 249. Emphasis added.
32 Oddly, Chakrabarty denies that historicism implies teleology (PE 23). But his description of its basic elements, and his examples, create a strong impression that teleology is in fact what he has in mind.
the logic of capital, and thereby insert numerous “heterogeneities and incommensurabilities” into its homogenizing drive. But the hold of History 1 makes historicists blind to these differences. And where they cannot ignore them, they simply affix an expiration date on them: historicism creates the illusion that the myriad social practices that escape the logic of capital, that do not reflect its basic properties, are bound to dissolve in due course. History 1 will subjugate/subordinate them as it proceeds toward its singular future.

Chakrabarty’s abiding concern here seems to be how to best understand capitalism’s spread. Chakrabarty worries that universalizing theories project the experience of Western modernity onto the postcolonial world. They assume that just because capitalism has globalized, it will trigger the same political and cultural transformation in the East as it did in the West. Historicists, he argues, are so convinced of capital’s homogenizing effects that they treat the postcolonial world as if it is in a waiting room, biding its time as it waits for its own modernity to become a reflection of the European. Whatever differences there now are will be erased as capitalism attains full expression. And since they are destined to disappear, these differences are treated as mere anachronisms or holdovers, unworthy of serious analysis, precisely because their days are numbered. So historicists become incapable of appreciating the specificity of postcolonial modernity, because they are convinced that capitalism dissolves all social difference—you just have to give it time.

And which theories are likeliest to generate such a blindness to this sort of teleology? Theories stemming from the West, of course—the products of Enlightenment thinking:

Ideas, old and new, about discontinuities, ruptures, and shifts in the historical process have from time to time challenged the dominance of historicism, but much written history still remains deeply historicist. That is to say, it still takes its object of investigation to be internally unified, and sees it as developing over time. This is particularly true—for all their differences with classical historicism—of historical narratives underpinned by Marxist or liberal views of the world, and is what underlies descriptions/explanations in the genre “history of”—capitalism, industrialization, nationalism, and so on.

It is important that we see the close connection between Western theories’ blindness to History 2 and their abiding Eurocentrism. As I observed above, within the terms of Chakrabarty’s argument the existence of History 2 presents a problem for all abstract theorizing, whether of the West or of the East. But the problem does not affect the basic analytical frameworks symmetrically. It

33 PE 95.
34 PE 23. Emphasis added.
is far more damaging when Western theories travel to the East than it is when they train their lens on the West. For the West, we should remember, has been "blessed" with a genuinely revolutionary bourgeoisie, which has transformed its social space, integrated the subaltern domain, and brought a far greater range of social relations into conformity with capital's reproductive logic. The West conforms to History 1 far more than does the East, where capital abandoned its universalizing mission. When categories developed out of the Western experience travel eastward, they take for granted that a social transformation has occurred more or less in line with what transpired in Europe. In this sense, Chakrabarty argues, they carry an imprint, a marker of the conditions from which they arose. When it is mobilized in the analysis of non-Western social formations, this imprint becomes a prejudice—it becomes Eurocentrism. It refuses to recognize the numerous ways in which real history in the non-West fails to conform to the homogenizing assumptions of Western theory.35 Or, owing to their historicist bias, when these theories do take notice of differences, they blithely assume that these are only temporary phenomena, because sooner or later History 1 will end up subjugating all the diverse History 2s and remake the East into the image of the West.36 Hence, while the existence of History 2 is problematic for Enlightenment theories tout court, it becomes something more specific when they are brought to the East. It generates what we know as Eurocentrism.

This brings to a close our synopsis of Chakrabarty's arguments about the Two Histories, the special role of History 2, and the consequences of historians ignoring that role. It is worth noting that his analysis of historicism rides almost entirely on his understanding of the Two Histories. It is a mode of reasoning that fails to appreciate the way in which History 2 punctures and destabilizes both capital's universalizing drive and also its reproduction. All of this presupposes, of course, that capital's universalization is in fact disrupted in the manner described by Chakrabarty, that History 2 is the reason for its disruption, and that History 1 is committed to subordinating all elements of History 2 to its own functional requirements. If the dynamics of the Two Histories do not in fact have these properties, then we certainly cannot indict historians of being insensitive to their effects. What Chakrabarty calls historicism is a failing only if his theorization of the Two Histories has some purchase. I therefore turn our attention to an assessment of his argument about the two histories and then move on to his critique of historicism.

36 See Chakrabarty's discussion of anachronisms at PE 238–9, 253–4.
9.4 ABSTRACT CATEGORIES AND THE REAL HISTORY OF CAPITAL

Chakrabarty is right to distinguish between those practices that are constitutive of capitalist reproduction—and are thereby “posited” by capital, or part of its “life process”—and those that are not. This is simply another way of recognizing that some practices are essential to capitalist reproduction, while others are not. Not every social relation is an expression of capitalism, even after that system has taken hold of a social formation. In a very broad way, then, I agree with his distinction between something akin to History 1 and History 2. As he observes, it was a distinction made by Marx and, we might add, defended by many analysts within the Marxian tradition over the course of the twentieth century. But despite my having agreed that such a distinction is warranted, I intend to argue that none of the conclusions Chakrabarty derives from it can be defended: the existence of History 2 does not mean that universalization is never complete; it does not follow that the source of instability for capital is History 2; it is not the case that there is an inbuilt antagonism between History and History 2; and finally, it is not at all the case that History 1, through the agency of capital, is committed to the subjugation or erasure of History 2. Hence, we find ourselves confronted with quite different implications concerning the viability of the abstract, universalizing categories of the Enlightenment tradition, and are led to the view that these frameworks are not only quite defensible but also a great deal more robust than Chakrabarty seems to think.

HISTORY 2 DOES NOT UNDERMINE CAPITAL’S UNIVERSALIZATION

Chakrabarty is quite clear that as long as there are social practices that remain outside the orbit of capital, the universalization process has to be regarded as incomplete. This is what it means to say that the presence of History 2 serves to block the universalization of capital. It should be evident that this is an astonishingly stringent test for capital’s universalization. As I argued in chapter 5, Subalternist theorists work with an unduly expansive notion of what capitalism is supposed to universalize.37 We saw that the most defensible case is for a narrower conception, in which capitalist globalization amounts to the universalization of practices relating to economic production. This is what most Marxists have understood by the term, as have many proponents of the scholarly traditions that Subalternist theorists traduce. Chakrabarty’s argument amounts to the rather absurd view that universalization requires the subordination of all practices to the dictates of capitalism, to the “logic of capital.” Yet I am unaware of any theorist outside the domain of postcolonial studies who would defend this view, nor do I see any justification for it.

As it happens, Chakrabarty admits that economic practices have been so

37 See above, 101–2. 101–12.
transformed in many postcolonies. He agrees that the economic logic of capitalist production has established itself in the East; he even allows that it might have become dominant. But he insists that the fact of production having changed in this fashion is insufficient to warrant the conclusion that capitalism has universalized—because, for him, capitalism must do more than just change the logic of economic activity. As long as practices that fall under History 2 can maintain their independence, he insists that the universalization process is incomplete.

But why should we accept the notion that for capital to have universalized, it must have obliterated History 2? Why can we not say that as long as History 1 has established itself, is stable, and reproduces itself over time, then its universalization is a fact of life, even if the practices in History 2 continue to exist? Chakrabarty does not present a systematic argument to counter this objection. Based on scattered comments in the text, however, his justification seems to be the following: the reason we can deny that capital has universalized is that History 2 modifies the operation of History 1. Consequently, the pure logic of capital, which is what universalization is putatively importing into the East, never really takes hold. What does take hold is a logic modified by the influence of History 2. Chakrabarty variously refers to these effects of History 2 as “modifying,” “disrupting,” “interrupting,” and the like, in regard to their relation to History 1. All these expressions push in the same direction, namely, that History 2 matters because it forces changes in the operations of History 1. A charitable interpretation of Chakrabarty’s argument, then, is that History 2 forces a modification of what is being universalized. This being the case, he would suggest, we cannot assume that the story told through the logic of History 1 will ever be the story actually unfolding on the ground. It will be inflected through the workings of History 2. This is the most favorable interpretation of Chakrabarty’s argument. It constitutes the premise from which he draws his conclusion that capital never in fact universalizes, even as it globalizes.

But here is the problem: even if we accept Chakrabarty’s premise—that History 2 modifies or interrupts the logic of History 1—it does not justify his conclusion that universalization cannot ever be complete. Consider what it means for such a modification to take place. We have certain expectations of agents as bearers of History 1—as workers, as capitalists, as landlords. Our expectations are that they will follow certain basic rules in order to reproduce themselves. These rules are what we describe as their “logic of reproduction.” Now, suppose that under the influence of History 2, agents are forced to modify the pure logic of their position, as described in History 1. When practices depart in some way from the logic, or rules, of reproduction, as described at a general level, this departure can be of two kinds: one that maintains the integrity of the

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38 See his discussion at PE 70.
rules, even if it modifies them somewhat; or one that forces a transformation of the rules' basic integrity.

In the context of Chakrabarty's argument, surely the question is whether the modification induced by History 2 preserves the basic integrity of the rules, even if it makes some modifications in their details. If the effects of History 2 leave intact the basic rules, then they do not change the type of practice that the rules are generating. The modification, in this case, would be considered type-preserving. On the other hand, if the changes wrought by History 2 are of a more significant order, such that they undermine the basic integrity of the rules that agents are following, then they would end up changing the very nature of the practice generated by the rules. If the change is of this kind, then the effect of History 2 would be type-transforming. Changes that are type-preserving do not justify the conclusion that Chakrabarty wishes to endorse. They would keep intact the basic structure of the rule, and hence of the practices it generates. Only changes that are type-transforming—those that change the basic goals or the strategies of the actors—would justify the conclusion that the practice no longer conforms to its abstract description.

The crucial point here is that Chakrabarty provides no evidence that the modifications caused by History 2 are type-transforming. All his descriptions of the effects of History 2 are instances of type-preserving modifications. Indeed, in much of his discussion, the effects of History 2 are even weaker. They simply change certain details of the practices that embody capital's basic reproductive logic, without making any discernible changes at all in the logic itself. Or they carry the potential of disrupting the logic of reproduction inscribed in History 1, but without any guarantee that they will in fact do so. If History 2 merely manages to tweak the social relations or practices of History 1, but leaves intact their basic integrity, then Chakrabarty's argument loses its force. As a result, even if we accept his characterization of History 2 and his description of how it

39 See his discussion of festivals in which Bengali workers offer prayer to their machines, or of weavers who recite hymns while working on their looms (PE: 77–83). Chakrabarty apparently sees these as instances of History 2 having modified the universalizing logic of History 1—these workers and weavers are not embodiments of the "secular" logic of capital. To them, work and religion, the secular and the sacred, are inextricably fused, which means that the abstract description of their status as workers or weavers has been modified by the concrete elements of their worldview. But does this in any way succeed as an indictment of the abstract categories? On my argument, it does not. What those categories, and the framework in which they are embedded, predict is that laborers who are dependent on the market will have to produce at certain levels of efficiency—it simply makes no claims about their normative universe, except that it will have to accommodate a subjective orientation sensitive to the compulsions of market success. Whether that comes with a secular or a sacred conception of work is irrelevant, as long as the laborers are attuned to the compulsions of the market. No doubt, their practice has been modified in some way by their local beliefs or institutions—by History 2. But these modifications do not disturb the basic integrity of the rules to which they are now subject. Nothing in Chakrabarty's description leads us to think otherwise.
affects the operation of History 1, these are consistent with capital's universalization. That is, even if History 2 has the effect of modifying History 1, it does not alter the latter's fundamental logic. We are therefore justified in concluding that the basic rules of the agents' reproduction have not been disturbed, even if their workings, or the form in which they are instantiated, may have been affected to some degree.

The main principle at issue is this: no practice ever conforms in every detail to its abstract description. It is not an insight, therefore, to declare that this or that social fact has elements in it that are not present in its abstract delineation. The task of conceptual analysis is to decide whether its departure from the abstract description warrants an abandonment of the category attached to that description—such as the category "capitalist," or "accumulation"—or whether the departure can be accommodated by recognizing the modified practice as a variant or a subtype of the abstract category. If it is recognized as a variant or sub-type, then we preserve the abstract description, and the category to which it is attached. We agree that the category is real, that it has purchase on how social dynamics are actually unfolding. We simply recognize that the category can be instantiated in variable forms.

Chakrabarty argues that the universalization of capital is a myth, that it is forever incomplete because the actual practice of reproduction in the East does not conform to its abstract description as presented in the works of Marx or other Enlightenment thinkers. And the reason it does not conform to that description is that History 2 forces modifications in it. As demonstrated above, however, the mere fact that a practice fails to conform to its abstract description is not significant. What is significant is whether the departure changes the basic nature of the practice. In the context of our discussion here, the question becomes: When they impose modifications, do the various instances of History 2 force a type-transforming change in the logic of capitalist reproduction?

Since Chakrabarty repeatedly describes History 2 as modifying the logic of capitalist reproduction, he clearly agrees that capitalism does have an identifiable logic. Yet he offers no evidence that the modifications are of an order that would justify the conclusion that capitalists no longer follow the basic rules of accumulation, or that workers no longer reproduce themselves by selling their labor power. Yet this is exactly what it would mean for the logic of capital to be modified in a type-transforming way. Since he does not establish that the modifications are of the relevant kind, the simple fact that History 2 modifies or interrupts the reproduction of History 1 is inconsequential. We can accept his claim that it does—but still conclude that the universalization of capital is an accomplished fact.

THE SOURCE OF CAPITAL'S DESTABILIZATION IS NOT HISTORY 2

We have now established that capital's universalization does not require that each and every social practice abide by its logic of reproduction. The mere fact
some social relations have their own particular rules, independent of the rules generally characteristic of capitalism, does not allow us to conclude that the universalizing process has been interrupted. It follows that capital can universalize its rule and establish its control over economic reproduction even while myriad components of social life maintain their autonomy. And even when History 2 interacts with and modifies capital's reproduction, what matters is whether the modification transforms the basic rules of reproduction essential to capitalism. The mere existence of History 2 does not undermine the claim that capital has universalized its rule over the course of the modern era.

If it is true, contrary to Chakrabarty's contention, that universalization can proceed even while History 2 maintains its integrity, then Chakrabarty is also wrong to insist that the basic function of History 2 is to undermine capital's universalization. The only way this conclusion could be justified would be if History 2 necessarily forced fundamental changes in the logic of History 1. But this characterization is impossible to derive from Chakrabarty's own argument. Remember that he defines History 2 simply as those practices that "do not lend themselves to the logic of reproduction of capital"; elsewhere he quotes Marx to define it as practices that capital influences in some way but "not as antecedents established by itself, not as forms of its own life-process." Theses characterizations can only establish that History 2 retains its integrity inside capitalism and that it refuses to align itself with bourgeois rules of reproduction.

But the mere fact that some social relations retain their independence cannot possibly justify regarding them as practices that will undermine or disrupt capitalism. They might just as easily continue to reproduce themselves on a parallel track, abiding by their own internal logic, while capital pushes along in its own grooves. They will be a source of instability only if their conditions of reproduction clash in some way with the conditions that sustain capitalism. But is this a realistic assumption? Even while some relations associated with History 2 might be dysfunctional for capital, it is simply impossible to imagine that every such relation would have to be. Chakrabarty seems to equate the autonomy of a practice from the logic of capitalism with that practice being corrosive to capitalism. This amounts to the claim that unless a social practice is functional to capitalism's stability, it is necessarily dysfunctional. It is hard to imagine how such a claim could be supported. Chakrabarty is therefore quite mistaken to conclude that, just because History 2 might retain its own integrity, it has the effect of interrupting capital's universalization.

Of course, it is probably true that some practices internal to History 2 will indeed conflict with capitalist dynamics. But even though they may conflict with capitalism, it does not follow that they will disrupt its reproduction or its

40 PE 67.
41 PE 63.
universalization. The mere fact that a practice or norm conflicts with capitalism's logic says nothing at all about its capacity to successfully block capitalism. It could very well be that instances of History 2 will encounter capitalism, clash with it . . . and then find themselves transformed by it. In other words, it could be that, on those occasions where the logics of History 1 and History 2 clash, it will be History 1 that prevails. Workers might change their work habits to keep their jobs, capitalists might ignore their sectarian beliefs and hire workers from other religions, and so on. Hence, the mere fact of there being an incompatibility between the two will not suffice to resuscitate Chakrabarty's argument. In addition to their incompatibility, it must also be the case that the practices associated with History 2 have the social support—and its agents the capacity—to overturn the demands imposed by capitalism. Only if all these conditions are in place can we conclude that History 2 will have the effect of blocking the universalization of capital.

Since it is impossible to assume that the conditions enumerated here are in fact intrinsic to History 2, we are justified in rejecting the argument that it is the function of History 2 to destabilize History 1. At best, we can say that certain instances of History 2 might, in some situations, succeed in doing so. Whether or not they do depends upon some contingent facts about their content, their obduracy, the social strength of their practitioners, their capacity to defend themselves against the demands of capital, and so on. In other words, the best we can do for Chakrabarty is to break down History 2 into two categories, History 2, which encompasses practices that are independent of capital but in a benign way, such that they do not clash with it; and History 2, which encompasses practices that are independent of capital and do clash with it. Only the latter pose any threat to capital's universalization, and even here, only a further subset of these could be expected to hold up under the pressure of capital's formidable demands.

We have thus arrived at two conclusions. First, even given Chakrabarty's own definition of them, there is no systematic conflict between the Two Histories. The conflict involves only a small subset of History 2; moreover, the outcome of that conflict, when it does occur, cannot be prejudged. Second, it follows that History 2 poses no systematic threat to the integrity, or the outward thrust, of History 1. Again, it could do so under certain conditions, but those conditions cannot be assumed to be always in place. The broad conclusion that derives from this is that insofar as History 2 constitutes any threat to History 1, that threat is contingent and episodic.

**The main source of capital's destabilization is History 1**

If Chakrabarty overestimates the power of History 2 to destabilize History 1, he vastly underestimates the sources of instability within History 1 itself. It is hard to find many passages in *Provincializing Europe* where he discusses the sources
of disruption to capital's reproduction that are located within Enlightenment universals—capital, freedom, democracy, citizenship, etc. But it should be clear that there exist *systematic contradictions* between capital's logic of reproduction and some of these universals—in other words, between capital's logic and various components of History 1. Furthermore, I propose that these conflicts are not only systematic, but are far more corrosive to the conditions of capital's reproduction than the practices associated with History 2. Let me now move to a defense of this proposition.

That Chakrabarty never seriously considers the possibility of capital being destabilized by elements internal to History 1 is a consequence, I believe, of his characterization of History 1 as those practices that are “posited” by capital itself and that “contribute to the life-process” of capitalism. Since they are implanted by capital, and since they are conditions of its reproduction, they are assumed to be univocal in their effects—benign, never corrosive. But this conclusion does not follow from the premise.

The fact that certain practices or institutions are critical to the survival of a system does not preclude the possibility of their becoming a source of breakdown. One way in which such breakdowns can occur is through what Jon Elster has called *counterfinality*: when actions or practices that might be individually beneficial aggregate into outcomes that are self-defeating.42 For example, the universal drive for profits is certainly an essential practice within capitalism, but actions that benefit an employer individually can become self-defeating if carried out by everyone—such as when the higher profits that come from suppressing wages in one firm are undermined once all employers suppress wages, thereby contracting the market for their goods. The fact that key elements contribute to capitalism's reproduction does not guarantee that they will not also contribute to its breakdown. Indeed, it is precisely because of their being essential to its reproduction that they can act as a source of instability for the system itself.

From Smith to Keynes, every major theory of capitalism has located deep and abiding sources of instability within what Chakrabarty would call History 1—but not in History 2. Marx was, of course, the most obvious exemplar of this view. In his theory, capitalism's reproduction is interrupted, not by the obdurescence of local cultures, norms, or practices, but by the very practices that are “posited” by capital. None is more central to this than accumulation itself. As Marx famously expressed it, “The true barrier to capitalist production is capital itself.”43 What he meant was that the rules by which capitalist accumulation takes place are self-defeating. They demand of each entrepreneur that she place

42 To my knowledge, Jon Elster introduced this concept in his *Logic and Society: Contradictions and Possible Worlds* (New York: Wiley, 1978), chap. 5.

the profit motive above all else, as a condition for surviving in the market. Yet, even though each individual capitalist has good reason to pursue success through cost-cutting innovations, the aggregate effect of these strategies is to weaken the underlying conditions of reproduction for capital, and eventually to plunge the economy into a crisis—thereby creating a rupture in the cycle of reproduction. The crisis thus stems from the very core of the universal, abstractly defined rules of accumulation. But this is not just a fact about Marx's theory. It is also true of Smith, Ricardo, and Keynes. Each of these theorists developed an analysis of capitalism that located its fragility, its vulnerability to crisis, within the basic rules of the system itself. Furthermore, precisely because its source is the very practices essential to the system, the connection between these practices and breakdown is both deeper, and more explosive, than anything Chakrabarty establishes for History 2.

There is, however, a second source of disruption to capital's logic that is located within History 1. This is the universal interest that working people have to protect their well-being from capitalist authority and abuse. I have already defended the notion that some such interest exists, and indeed, that the Subalternist theorists themselves rely on the existence of this interest in their historical analyses. Recall that Guha pointedly defends this view in Elementary Aspects of Peasant Insurgency in Colonial India, as we witnessed in chapter 7; Chatterjee sneaks it into his account of Bengali peasant mobilizations, which we also examined in chapter 7; Chakrabarty admits to its existence in his labor history, examined in chapter 8. For our purposes, what deserves emphasis is that this interest—and others we might include, such as the interest in autonomy or self-determination—properly belong, on Chakrabarty's own definition, to History 1. What distinguishes History 1, remember, is that it encompasses the "Enlightenment universals." Capital and its cognates are central to this group of universals, of course, but so are such abstract concepts as freedom, democracy, and citizenship. On more than one occasion, Chakrabarty explicitly makes reference to these as belonging to History 1.

The interest in well-being is a fundamental source of instability to capital, simply because of its ubiquity—it is built into the psychology of social agents, regardless of culture or location. The very fact that cultures exist at all presupposes that social agents have a drive to protect their basic needs. But precisely because this interest is a component of human nature, it necessarily brings workers into conflict with the logic of accumulation, wherever and whenever it

44 I have deliberately formulated this logic at a very abstract level, so that it does not depend on the viability of any particular Marxist crisis theory. My construal of the dilemmas of accumulation is intended to be agnostic toward, and consistent with, the three main crisis theories within the Marxian tradition—the rising organic composition of capital, underconsumption, and disproportionality.

45 See PE 67, 250.
unfolds. And thus, as explored above in chapters 6 and 8, it was only through subaltern mobilizations that capitalism was civilized. These nineteenth-century struggles were nothing other than a modification of capital's logic. As Marx showed in such graphic detail in the chapters on machinery and the working day in the first volume of *Capital*, the struggle for limiting the working day not only added to the well-being of British workers, it also forced capitalists to change their accumulation strategy, making them abandon a wholesale reliance on increasing surplus value by sweating labor—what he called absolute surplus value—and turn instead to productivity-enhancing means—what he called relative surplus value. These specific struggles occurred in Victorian England, but they have been played out all over the globe, wherever capital has established its rule. They are, to use Chakrabarty's language, a part of the universal and necessary history of capital, and hence of History 1.

Even though both these sources of instability—capitalism's structural pathologies and labor's resistance—can disrupt capital's reproduction, they do not operate in the same way, nor do they have the same effects. Although Chakrabarty often uses the two phenomena interchangeably, it is important to maintain a distinction between the disruption of capital's logic and the disruption of its universalization. A pattern of reproduction can be disrupted, interrupted, or dislocated—all expressions used by Chakrabarty—and it can then resume anew, begin a new cycle, after the disruption. In other words, the mere disruption of its reproduction need not derail its ongoing universalization, because the disruption can simply be temporary, after which the universalization can continue apace, once the system has recuperated. But for the universalization of its logic to be undermined requires something beyond a mere interruption of its normal routine of reproduction. It requires a transformation of the rules of reproduction in a fundamental way, as argued above.

Both these sources of instability interrupt and destabilize capital's logic of reproduction, but only one truly undermines its universalization. Structurally generated crises—whether from falling profitability or from imbalances across sectors—do not, as far as I can glean, constitute a block to capital's universalization. If anything, they probably accelerate it. As David Harvey has noted, crises often trigger an outward expansion of capitalism, in search of new markets, new and cheaper inputs, as a "spatial fix." In this manner, crises accelerate the outward expansion of capital, and the imposition of its own rules of reproduction on new territories. By contrast, labor struggles offer the promise of far more fundamental threats to capital's reproduction. True, in many cases, even in most cases, such struggles modify these rules, keeping their basic integrity unchanged. But when and where the rules themselves

have been transformed in some far-reaching way, it has been as a consequence of the universal struggle of working people to defend against capital's deprivations and to improve their welfare.

Hence, if there is any genuine source of opposition to capital's universalizing drive, it is the equally universal struggle by subaltern classes to defend their basic humanity. That is the core motivation in all those thousands of campaigns for wages, land rights, basic health, and security, dignity, self-determination, autonomy, and so forth—all those Enlightenment concepts against which postcolonial theorists inveigh. The "heterogeneities and incommensurabilities" of History 2 pale in comparison.

**THERE IS NO NECESSARY ANTAGONISM BETWEEN HISTORY 1 AND HISTORY 2**

If it is not the function of History 2 to interrupt or derail capital's reproduction, then there is no reason for capital to "subjugate or destroy" History 2, as Chakrabarty insists it must do. There is no necessary antagonism between History 1 and History 2. I have suggested that we should disaggregate History 2 into two subcategories—History 2₁, which is independent of capital and does not clash with it in any way, and History 2₂, which is independent of capital and does clash with it. It should be evident that there is no question of any antagonism between History 1 and History 2₁. If there is any conflict at all, it is with History 2₂. So, at best, we can only allow that History 1 might have to destroy or subordinate elements of History 2₂. But this gives only limited succor to Chakrabarty's argument, because, crucially, we have no idea how extensive or powerful are the practices associated with History 2₂ compared with those of History 2₁. It could be that the vast majority of social practices in History 2 are in fact located in the 2₁ group, which is neutral toward History 1.

Indeed, this latter possibility would seem the more likely. Consider the implications if most practices that are independent of capital's rules are also inimical to its reproduction—in other words, that they belong to History 2₂. If this were the case, then capital would have to transform *entire cultures* as a precondition to its stable reproduction. On the other hand, if it were the case that most components of History 2 belonged to History 2₁, which is neutral toward capital, then the cultural preconditions for capitalism's stable reproduction would be far less demanding. It would now require the transformation of a far smaller set of practices, meaning that capitalism would face fewer cultural obstacles to its implantation in the far reaches of the globe. Surely, if we look back at the experience of the twentieth century, in which capitalism has spread to every corner of the world despite the enormous diversity of cultures, it is the second proposition that seems the more plausible. This is not to deny that globalization has brought with it some deep and lasting cultural changes. But it
The absence of antagonism between History 1 and History 2 is best illustrated through a consideration, once again, of abstract labor. We have already broached this issue in chapter 6, where I examined Lisa Lowe's mistaken view that the persistence of racial and cultural hierarchies in the labor force counted against the concept of abstract labor. I took up the issue because it exemplified the postcolonialists' suspiciousness toward abstract categories, and showed the mistakes that bedevil their analysis. Let us now turn to how Chakrabarty mobilizes the concept of abstract labor to prove his particular arguments, and I will show that, as with Lowe, his analysis is based on subtle but fundamental misconceptions about the concept.

Chakrabarty uses the example of abstract labor to illustrate his claim that History 1 must subjugate or destroy History 2. He invites us to consider the example of a laborer who shows up at the factory gates at 8:00 AM, ready to put in a full day's work. In his capacity as a worker, as a person willing to sell his labor power for a wage, he embodies all the abstract categories of political economy. As he walks through the factory gates, he becomes part of the universal history of capital, hence a part of History 1. Chakrabarty observes that inasmuch as the worker comes prepared to offer his laboring activity, "Everything I have said about abstract labor' will apply to him or her." But the worker is also a concrete person, steeped in his local culture and norms and shaped by his biographical peculiarities, none of which are part of History 1. This, Chakrabarty says, places some parts of his past experiences, and some of his current proclivities, in the category of History 2:

While walking through the factory gate, however, my fictional person also embodies other kinds of pasts. These pasts, grouped together in my analysis of History 2, may be under the institutional domination of the logic of capital and exist in approximate relationship to it, but they do not belong to the "life-process" of capital. They have not homogenized the cultural landscape. This suggests that capital can subsist, even flourish, without having to revolutionize entire cultures.

The fact that they are mistaken in their conclusions is not really important here. The important point is that they admit the implantation of capitalism in enormously diverse cultural settings. What this shows is that capitalism does not need to homogenize the entire social landscape. The reason is that most of the landscape belongs to History 2, the part that is neutral to capitalism's basic rules.

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48 We need look to no other source than Chakrabarty and his fellow postcolonial theorists for support on this front. Remember that it is a premise of postcolonial theory that capital has not been able to homogenize the social landscape. This was the argument that Lisa Lowe advanced in her mistaken criticism of Marx's concept of abstract labor. It is also a foundation for Chakrabarty's insistence that universalization has failed. Both of them take the persistent heterogeneity of cultures as a datum, even while they admit that capital has spread across the world. It is just that they interpret the persistence of diversity as evidence for the failure of capital's universalization. The fact that they are mistaken in their conclusions is not really important here. The important point is that they admit the implantation of capitalism in enormously diverse cultural settings. What this shows is that capitalism does not need to homogenize the entire social landscape. The reason is that most of the landscape belongs to History 2, the part that is neutral to capitalism's basic rules.

49 PE 65, 67.
50 PE 66.
enable the human bearer of labor power to enact other ways of being in the world—other than, that is, being the bearer of labor power. 51

So the worker embodies both kinds of possibilities within his own person. On the one hand, he is capable of being the abstract laborer, the repository of labor power that capital seeks in order to sustain the accumulation process. On the other hand, the worker also reflects the particularities of the local culture, which were not molded by capital and which reflect ways of being that do not conform to its functional requirements. This, Chakrabarty declares, represents a fundamental threat to capital, and it responds to the threat by trying to destroy History 2. The site where capital carries out its assault on History 2 is the labor process:

The disciplinary process in the factory is in part meant to accomplish the subjugation/destruction of History 2. Capital, Marx's abstract category, says to the laborer: "I want you to be reduced to sheer living labor—muscular energy plus consciousness—for the eight hours for which I have bought your capacity to labor. I want to effect a separation between your personality (that is, the personal and collective histories you embody) and your will (which is characteristic of sheer consciousness) . . ." 52

Chakrabarty is building here on his analysis of abstract labor, which precedes this discussion of the labor process. 53 For him, capital creates abstract labor in the labor process by imposing work discipline on the laborers. What the capitalist acquires as the worker enters the factory gate is not abstract labor, but what Chakrabarty calls "real labor." 54 The challenge for management is to turn this real, concrete labor into abstract labor. This transformation is what the labor process is meant to accomplish, through the imposition of factory discipline. 55 The disciplinary process is geared toward reducing the worker to sheer living energy, pure muscular activity, an appendage to the machine. In so doing, it erases his history, all the local norms and conventions that have produced him as a concrete person—"the personal and collective histories you embody"—so that he conforms to the needs of his employer. The motivation behind this assault on the worker comes from the threat posed by History 2. Notice that in the passages I have quoted, Chakrabarty locates the threat of the worker's noncompliance in those dimensions of his past that are located in History 2. It is History 2 that generates "ways of being in the world other than being the

51 Ibid.
52 PE 67.
53 See PE 51–6.
54 PE 92, 94–5.
55 PE 55–7, 95.
bearer of labor power.” Hence, in order to establish its authority over the laborer, capital must turn him into the bearer of labor power pure and simple. It does this by destroying History 2.

This entire line of reasoning, however, rests on a basic misconception about what capital seeks. Chakrabarty treats capitalists’ desire to mold their workers into “sheer living labor” as the main object of the labor process. But this is erroneous. While managers do design the organization of work in a way that enables them to dominate labor, this is a secondary aim, put to the service of another, more fundamental desideratum. Recall the core of my argument in chapter 6: what managers pursue when they hire labor is, in the first instance, the extraction of work effort at benchmark levels of intensity. This is what we might call the first-order commitment of every capitalist. All of their shop-floor strategies toward labor, upon which Chakrabarty focuses, are derived in pursuit of this basic goal, and are therefore to be regarded as second-order goals. The degree and kind of authority that are wielded in the labor process are thus useful only because they serve the purpose of extracting the needed level of work effort.

This being the case, we are compelled to ask whether the pursuit of socially necessary labor requires that managers try to eliminate all of the laborer’s History 2. Does it demand that the worker lose all connection with “the personal and collective history” that shaped him? This would be the only justification for treating the labor process as if it were fundamentally geared toward these ends. It would have to be the case that, in order to secure the socially necessary labor effort, managers would have no choice but to obliterate every trace of each worker’s particular normative universe. But it should be quite obvious that extracting the needed labor effort requires the subjugation of only those aspects of the worker’s culture that inhibit his ability or his willingness to work as needed. Moreover, these recalcitrant elements of his culture will comprise only a part of the total. The only grounds on which we could accept Chakrabarty’s argument—that capital requires an all-out assault on History 2 as a whole—would be if we presume that every component of local culture that deviates from the direct needs of capital is thereby, and necessarily, inimical to capitalist reproduction. Simply stating this premise reveals it as utterly bizarre.

A far more reasonable argument is that managers will initiate measures to “subjugate or destroy” elements of History 2 only in those instances where they do conflict with the extraction of socially necessary labor power. But, in those instances where the elements are neutral to the labor effort, managers will simply be indifferent to them. In other words, capital simply does not care about workers’ local culture as long as it does not interfere with the accumulation process. Managers’ attitude toward the manifold elements in History 2 will therefore be indifference, not hostility, as long as they are able to acquire the labor effort they seek. As long as capitalists are able to transform this particular dimension of the workers’ culture, they are content to let the other dimensions
persist in all their glory. Indeed, management may even patronize these other dimensions if they feel this will help inure workers to their authority. It has been a staple of human resource management for some time now to pay homage to local cultures as a way of reducing friction on the shop floor. Business schools often encourage and offer training in multiculturalism, not as a sign of resignation against the proud resistance of History 2 but as a savvy realization that the valorization of the neutral dimensions of local culture can help in the domestication of the problematic ones. Some of the more insidious mutations of this strategy were described in Chapter 6, where I discussed the possibility of managerial promotion of sectarian identities as a means of disciplining labor.

If it is true that capitalists can securely extract the socially necessary effort from labor without having to wipe out History 2, then we have established, once again, that there is no necessary antagonism between History 1 and History 2. We have also seen that such antagonism as can be expected will encompass only a subset of the worker’s practical culture. A significant array of his practical orientations will be of little consequence to managers, and hence to capital. History 1 is therefore perfectly happy to coexist with many elements of History 2.

This conclusion is entirely consistent with my earlier analysis of abstract labor in chapter 6. I argued there that employers’ pursuit of abstract labor should not be understood as a desire to render all labor the same. Abstract labor is not a distinct kind of labor. It refers to only one dimension of workers’ productive activity, which is their ability to labor at the socially necessary level of efficiency. Capitalists try only to bring that dimension of their workers’ activity into line with that achieved by their rivals; however, in striving to homogenize this dimension of labor, they may well deepen the heterogeneity in other dimensions, such as race, caste, culture or gender. Lisa Lowe and David Roediger make the error of equating the homogenization of one dimension of labor with the homogenization of labor tout court. It should now be evident that Chakrabarty is making the same mistake. For him, as for Roediger and Lowe, the pursuit of abstract labor can be understood only as its homogenization. In his insistence that capital must eradicate all History 2s, he is asserting that capital will not tolerate in its workers any vestige of local customs, practices, or expectations that do not conform to its functional requirements. Either capital homogenizes labor’s practical orientation, making every worker a mere assemblage of nerves and muscle, or the universalizing process must be deemed a failure. The preceding discussion demonstrates that he is as mistaken in his view as are Lowe and Roediger.

A final point: Because of his mistaken view that it is by History 2 that the universalizing drive of capitalism is disrupted, Chakrabarty assigns a moral and political urgency to its study. If Enlightenment theorists efface historical difference because of their obsession with History 1, then a central task for critical historians is to defend the reality of difference by attending to the practices
embodied in History 2—to treat them as instances of resistance to capital, not as relics or anachronisms. Now, the preceding sections should suffice to show that the idea of History 2 as being special sites of resistance to capital is baseless. What, then, should be said of the celebration of what Chakrabarty calls, at various points, the East's heterogeneities, heterotemporalities, incommensurabilities, incommensurable temporalities, and so forth? Once the theoretical heavy breathing is allowed to slow, what it amounts to is just what it seems to be—a license for exoticism. Once we recognize that History 2 neither destabilizes capital's universalization nor poses any threat to its reproduction, then there is nothing to justify Subalternist historians' seemingly endless fascination with religion, ritual, spirits, indigeneity, and so on. We are free to criticize it for what it seems to be—a revival and celebration of Orientalist discourse.

9.5 HISTORICISM AS A NON-PROBLEM

Let us turn now to the problem of historicism. Chakrabarty's conceptualization of historicism, as we have seen, depends entirely on his prior theorization of the Two Histories. And, as just discussed, even though the basic distinction between the History 1 and History 2 can be justified, none of the consequences that Chakrabarty wishes to derive from them can withstand scrutiny. If this is so, it carries some rather severe implications for his critique of historicism.

Recall that Chakrabarty highlights two assumptions as being central to historicist analyses. One is that they tend to attribute an unwarranted coherence to social complexes, making their various elements seem functionally integrated. Social practices are assumed to fit into a single seamless whole, operating under the same logic and explicable by the same principles. Second, they treat history as if it were irrevocably driven toward a known future. For the future to be known is to assign to it a telos. It is the idea that even if we cannot predict the actual course of events in any given region, we can have a good idea of the basic principles that will govern its institutional development. Chakrabarty accuses historicists of embracing these fallacies because of their valorization of History 1 and their corresponding demotion of History 2. Both orientations lead to the same basic problem: they make it impossible to appreciate difference. Where practices fail to align with capital, and cannot therefore be explained by its properties, it is simply assumed that if we just wait long enough these practices will either disappear or be brought into conformity with capital's rules. He charges his target with the assumption that historical difference is taken as an aberration, a conceptual non-problem, for every instance of it must be temporary.

It is of course regrettable if theorists hew to a thick-headed functionalism about social wholes, and equally deplorable if they refuse to acknowledge historical diversity. The point is not to defend these mistakes, nor to deny that
they exist. The issue here is whether theorists who affirm the universalization of capital are bound and committed to such views and, by extension, whether Enlightenment theories necessarily generate them.

Let us start with the problem of social coherence. Based on my earlier arguments, we can glean two flaws in Chakrabarty's criticism. First, a theory that affirms capitalism's universalization does not have to assume that capital will subordinate the entirety of social practices to its own logic. Such a theory—Marxism, for instance—can perfectly well recognize the enduring independence of all sorts of practices and institutions, as was established earlier in the present chapter, where I argued that capitalists have no interest in subordinating all practices to the logic of accumulation. If indeed they have no such interest, then they can continue to reproduce themselves as capitalists on whatever resources are available to them. There is ample elbow room for History 2 to persist, and for a happy coexistence between it and History 1. This means, in turn, that the social whole—the ensemble of social relations in any geographic region—need not be subsumed under one particular set of rules. The various practices that comprise the whole can be governed by very dissimilar internal logics, even as capital universalizes. The most we can say is that practices necessary to capital's reproduction will fall under its sway. Many of them will internalize its rules of reproduction. But there will continue to be practices that retain their integrity, and also remain stable. Hence, theories affirming capital's universalizing drive do not have to efface historical diversity.

Second, it is simply not the case that post-Enlightenment theories' emphasis on universals blinds them to the possibility of "discontinuities, ruptures, and shifts in the historical process," as Chakrabarty puts it.56 As just discussed, the possibility of discontinuities and ruptures in capital's reproduction, as well as departures from its logic, was central to the Marxist framework, as also to several other theories in classical and modern political economy. Chakrabarty is in fact doubly mistaken: both in his view that Western theories cannot apprehend the discontinuities and ruptures in historical development, and in his belief that the main source of these ruptures is History 2. As shown above, the main source of instability and breakdown is not History 2 but rather the general, system-wide properties of capitalism itself, i.e., History 1. For Marxists—always the main target of Chakrabarty's criticism—the friction from the constituent elements of capitalism is amplified by another source of disruption, namely, the subaltern classes' universal drive to defend themselves against domination. Marx thought that the general drive to exploit was necessarily countered by a general resistance to it on the part of workers. This, too, is an instance of systemic friction coming from within History 1. Chakrabarty's insistence that the attention to universals occludes the appreciation of dislocation and
disruption is therefore baseless. If anything, we can insist on the opposite—it is simply impossible to understand the sources of disruption to capitalism's reproductive logic except through the categories of History 1.

So much for the first consequence that Chakrabarty attributes to historicism. Now to the second: that it leads theorists to deny the place of historical contingency. Does the affirmation of capital's universalization impose some kind of determinism, or teleology, on historical development? Marxists often respond to accusations of determinism by denying it, by jumping onto the contingency bandwagon—especially in the current intellectual climate, where any whiff of determinism is often viewed as the grossest folly. But it is important to resist this temptation. The fact is that the universalization of capital does impose limits on agents' choices, and if it imposes limits on their choices, it must, by definition, also impose limits on "possible futures." In other words, Chakrabarty is right that you cannot affirm the dominion of History 1 while also affirming that all futures are possible. So there is little doubt that the universalization of capital—by virtue of the fact that it is the universalization of a specific set of social structures and roles—does impart a degree of stability, and hence of determinism, to social outcomes. This is, to use Chakrabarty's language, a recognition that, once capitalism becomes dominant, at least some futures have been closed off. But should we take this as an unwarranted determinism? The only way it could be objectionable would be if it exaggerated the constraints imposed by capitalism. In other words, if capitalism really does close off some options, then Marxists can hardly be maligned for incorporating this into their theory. The only legitimate criticism would be if they are unduly deterministic—in other words, if their theory is more deterministic than reality.

How exactly, then, do Marxists fall into the trap of determinism? Chakrabarty neither accuses them of predicting the actual course of future events nor suggests that, for Marxists, all capitalisms are headed for a narrow institutional convergence. Determinism of that kind would certainly be objectionable, but it is not what Chakrabarty identifies with Marxist historicism.

What he identifies as the problem is their conviction that the future is "a future of which we know at least the constitutive principles, even if we do not have a blueprint for it." Note the contrast between the italicized concepts. It is quite clear what it would mean for there to be a blueprint for the future. Blueprints describe how the various elements of a whole fit together. They tell us what the elements are, their size, their shape, their interconnections. If we utilize this as a metaphor for historical knowledge, it suggests that if we have a blueprint for the future, we have the ability to enumerate the actual institutions that will comprise future society—their internal structure, mutual interrelations, relative weight, and so on. This would amount to being able to predict the
actual design of a particular society. Chakrabarty agrees that Marxist historicism does not make any such claim.

What Chakrabarty does identify as central to Marxist historicism, and finds objectionable, is its claim to have identified the constitutive principles that will define future development. As usual, though, Chakrabarty does not tell us what this expression is intended to convey. But the contrast with blueprints hints at what he has in mind. When we say that a process is governed by some principle, what we usually mean is that there is a set of rules in place whose function is to allow for certain kinds of properties while discouraging others. It is a selection mechanism. Therefore, even if we do not know the details of what is to come, we have an idea of certain formal properties that it will abide by, because these properties are what the rules select for.

Now, if we carry this intuition over to the problem of historical development, it acquires a clear implication. It means that capitalism establishes a set of parameters that select in favor of certain sorts of institutions while selecting against others. Hence, if Marxists argue that the future is governed by certain constitutive principles, this amounts to the claim that future social institutions will be powerfully constrained by pressures linked to capitalism—pressures like capital accumulation, the social power of the bourgeoisie, the demands of wage labor, and so on. The principles do not select for particular persons or any particular institutional layout. They would not mandate that the future nation-states take the design of David Cameron's United Kingdom, or that cultural production become exactly what Hollywood produces, or that labor processes look like mid-twentieth-century mass production. That would indeed amount to a blueprint. What they would impose is a set of parameters that social institutions would be constrained to respect. The main such parameter is that they not interfere with the accumulation of capital, and even that they encourage it. Social institutions could therefore be highly varied in their details, as long as they were consistent with the reproduction of capitalism. Marxists would predict that there will be pressure to commodify cultural production, but not to produce any particular product; pressure for states to favor capitalist interests, but not the interests of any particular capitalists; pressure for labor processes to conform to the demands of profitability, but not to hew to a particular model. Therein lies the difference between blueprints and principles.

I believe we now have an idea of what it might mean to have knowledge of certain constitutive principles governing historical development. But would those principles be equally binding on all social institutions? Does capitalism impose its imprint on every social practice or convention? The answer is already implicit in what has been explored in this chapter: that, in fact, capital's selectional pressures are not equally binding on all dimensions of social life. When capitalism takes root in a region, its transformative effects are felt, above all, in economic activities, while they are less powerful with respect to political and
cultural practices. True, some aspects of the latter two will no doubt be pulled quite firmly into a supporting role for capitalist production. Legal norms will have to recognize and defend property, the state will have to encourage accumulation, and even some cultural norms will have to accommodate the profit drive if they do not do so already. But there will be large swaths of political and ideological conventions that will be left largely to their own devices. What this means, then, is that some practices will find capitalism's "constitutive principles" quite powerful, even binding. These will be the practices that are intimately connected to economic reproduction—the practices Chakrabarty files under "History 1." But on other practices, more distant from material production, the pressures will impinge in varying degrees of intensity—rather powerfully on certain ones, and on others not at all. This is what is entailed in the proposition that capitalism establishes the constitutive principles for historical development, and thereby closes off certain futures.

If this is what it means for the future to abide by certain constitutive principles, then we are justified in asking—is it really so outrageous a claim? Does Chakrabarty really wish to deny that capitalism imposes limits on institutional variation? Does he think that all social practices are possible once capitalism takes hold? That it does not impose any limits on their diversity? That would be an odd position for someone who sees himself as a critic of capital.

We know by this point, of course, that Chakrabarty's main worry is not about the existence of constraints per se, but with how tight they are taken to be. He seems to think that, for Marxists, the constraints are so binding that they lead to the subordination of all social practices to the logic of capital—and if this were what the Marxist position demanded, then his worries would be justified. But I have shown in some detail that the concern is a figment of Chakrabarty's imagination. Marxist arguments do not require that all social relations become subject to capitalism's logic. They certainly do require that some practices become directly subject to capitalism's rules, namely the practices that govern the production of goods and services. As for practices and institutions that are not intrinsically connected to economic production, the requirement is less binding; in most cases, the extent to which they will be sucked into capital's orbit cannot be prejudged. This is another way of saying that it will be a contingent outcome of social contestation. But then Marxists can readily believe that historical development will be guided by certain constitutive principles, while still allowing for indeterminacy in a wide array of social outcomes.

So much for the second dimension of historicism. But if neither of the two dimensions poses a genuine threat, then nothing remains of Chakrabarty's argument. In other words, the problem of "historicism" vanishes. It is not that Chakrabarty's critique of historicism is flawed—rather, he has invented a problem where none exists. He deems it a live issue only because he first
misunderstands the implications of his distinction between History 1 and History 2, and then, on the basis of that misunderstanding, attributes to post-Enlightenment theories views that they do not hold. He thinks that if a theory is committed to the possibility of capital's universalization, it cannot allow for the enduring presence of the myriad practices in History 2. This incapacity supposedly flows from the idea that History 1 will necessarily subsume every social relation under its logic. But Chakrabarty's entire argument is based on a flawed premise—that for capital (History 1) to universalize, it must subjugate/subordinate the independence of History 2—hence, every element of the social whole that does not conform to capital's logic. Once we reject this premise, the rest of the framework he builds in Provincializing Europe simply collapses. Since universalization does not require the extinction of History 2, there is no necessary antagonism between the Two Histories. History 1 has no need to extinguish History 2. And since there is no antagonism, History 2 can happily persist, in all its multifarious glory, alongside History 1. Since History 2 can persist in this manner, there is no presumption that, if only we wait long enough, History 2 will just dissolve away or lose its independence. To be sure, practices internal to economic reproduction will be transformed along capitalist lines—this is where the "waiting room" metaphor is apt, and entirely defensible. But this transformation will not entail a corresponding erasure of all the elements in History 2. They will face no similar pressures to conform to a universalizing logic. Hence, the Two Histories can retain their own dynamic properties even while continuing to intersect now and again. Theories committed to the reality of capital's universalization do not, therefore, have to be blind to historical diversity. They can affirm the former, while also recognizing the viability of all the relations and practices that Chakrabarty groups under History 2.

9.6 Capitalism and Diversity Revisited

It is now time to draw together the argument about historical diversity and to show the multiple channels through which a universalizing capitalism generates a diversity of social forms.

Readers should take away two main points from the discussion below. The first is that capitalism is not only compatible with social difference, but systematically produces it. The second is that, insofar as a great deal of what we take to be social difference is in fact causally related to capitalist reproduction, it follows that the analysis of that diversity must, of necessity, draw on the universalizing categories of post-Enlightenment theories. So, while the first point undermines the frequently encountered postcolonialist argument that capitalism homogenizes the social, the second belies the claim that universalizing theories cannot apprehend heterogeneity.
THREE SOURCES OF DIVERSITY IN CAPITALISM

We have engaged with the Subalternist argument from diversity at several places in this book. It was central to chapter 5, on the matter of power; it was the focus of chapter 6 and its defense of abstract labor as a category; and of course, it was central to the discussion of historicism earlier in the present chapter. At all of these junctures, I have suggested both that capitalism can live with, and even generate, tremendous social heterogeneity, and that the abstract categories of Enlightenment thought can apprehend the connection between the two. Let me now bring together the arguments scattered across these four chapters and present them in consolidated form. The following are channels through which capitalism accommodates with, or generates, historical diversity. My list is by no means exhaustive, but I do believe these channels are the more important ones.

• First channel: Reinforcing existing heterogeneity

We have already encountered this dynamic in the discussion of abstract labor. Capitalism does not have to dissolve social differences in order to reproduce itself; in fact, it can be in the interest of managers to rely on social distinctions as they find them, in order to more effectively extract labor effort from their workers. A second mechanism through which it can reinforce existing divisions is by making it rational for workers to cling to their kith and kin, thereby further cementing their existing identities and reinforcing social heterogeneity, as we saw in our discussion of Chakrabarty's labor history. Both processes are endemic to capitalist reproduction. The former reinforces divisions from above, the latter from below.

• Second channel: Producing new heterogeneity

As we observed earlier, the main sources of friction in capitalism's reproduction, as well as in its universalization, are elements internal to History 1. One of the main consequences of the resulting instability is that capitalist development is markedly uneven across space and time. On the one hand, as capital moves from one region to another in the course of seeking out profits, it creates waves of destruction in certain places while fueling the creation of entirely new zones of accumulation elsewhere. But this movement occurs at different speeds across regions, as profits fall rapidly in some but more slowly in others. The differential speeds of capital's movement generate highly diverse rates of economic growth, which means in turn that some regions decline and decay, while others rise—all at very different tempos. These difference-producing dynamics are amplified by the contestation between labor and capital—also internal to History 1—that

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58 See Chap. 6 above.
59 See Chap. 8 above.
60 See Chap. 9 above, 229–33.
necessarily accompany the accumulation process, both as it winds down in a given region and as it takes off.

Thus, the diversity that comes from the unevenness of each cycle of accumulation, and from the rise and decline of economic regions, is heightened by the contingent effects of the capital-labor conflict. In some places, capital is able to impose its will with alacrity, while in others it is forced to accommodate labor's defense of its own well-being. Whatever the power balance happens to be in a given place, it produces its own institutional structure reflecting that balance. Thus, in postwar Europe, labor amassed enough power to build and sustain a powerful welfare state, trade unions, infrastructure, and so on, all of which in turn affected the pace of accumulation and the means of working-class reproduction. In the United States, on the other hand, a very different power balance between labor and capital led to a weaker social democracy, less powerful unions, highly privatized social provisions, and so on, producing a rather different set of accumulation strategies as well as quite distinct patterns of working-class reproduction. All this can be contrasted to the kinds of capitalism that were built up in the postcolonial world, with their own temporalities and their own accumulation patterns. And although all of these are variants within capitalism, they each exhibit their own temporal and spatial particularities. This is just another way of saying that capitalism promotes development—but that the development thus promoted is highly differentiated and uneven. Capitalism is anything but a purely homogenizing dynamic.

- Third channel: Indifference to existing heterogeneity

The third source of heterogeneity is capitalism's capacity for coexistence with all manner of social practices, so long as they do not clash with its logic of reproduction. Much of the current chapter has been devoted to this view.

Of the three channels just outlined, only one counts as being purely internal to History 1—the second channel, which concerns uneven development. The other two are either complete or partial cases of History 1's coexistence with History 2. If we consider the first of the three channels, whereby capitalism further promotes the inherited social diversity, this can certainly be accomplished through the destruction of History 2 or its subjugation to History 1. But this need not be so. It is not necessary to assume that the practices reinforced by capitalism will become absorbed into its reproductive logic; they can be strengthened without becoming dependent on it. To give but one example, in certain colonial settings, employers relied on traditional ruling classes to supply them with labor and to maintain political order. They did so not by destroying the basis of local authority, but by strengthening it. This was an example of capital's further solidification of practices that it did not control, and that did not follow the same reproductive rules as it did itself. No doubt,
certain aspects of traditional life were dramatically changed, as producers who had formerly been peasants were now forced to work for colonial firms as wage labor or indentured labor, but this transformation went hand in hand with the reinforcement of other traditional practices, which retained their own integrity. Hence, even while History 1 and History 2 interacted with each other, the former did not destroy the latter. What this example demonstrates is that when capitalism reinforces existing forms of social heterogeneity, it can do so without destroying the basis of their independent reproduction. It is an example of History 1 promoting History 2—the very opposite of what Chakrabarty predicts. Finally, of course, the third channel exemplifies the happy coexistence between the two Histories.

WHAT IT MEANS FOR THEORY

What do these three channels imply for theory? To develop an analysis of cases in which the production of diversity is causally related to capitalism, it will most likely be necessary to employ the very framework that Chakrabarty denigrates. In other words, since the practices or social forms under scrutiny are causally linked to capitalism, their analysis will make reference to whichever properties of capitalism are implicated in their reproduction. These properties may be internal to History 1, as in cases that fall under the second channel, or they may be interlocked with History 1 through some network, as in the case of colonial labor recruitment in the discussion of the first channel. In these cases, social difference will be explained as a consequence of capitalism's universalizing drive, and will deploy the universalizing categories of post-Enlightenment thought.

But in cases that embody the third channel, the universalizing categories of post-Enlightenment thought could well have no relevance to the practices in question. This is because the diversity being examined will be an instance of History 2 to which capitalism is largely indifferent. Remember that the myriad social practices to which we are referring here are the ones that retain their independence from the rules of capitalism. The explanations as to how and why they persist will, as a result, likely make no reference to capitalism. Unlike the first two channels, therefore, histories of these practices will not have to draw on the universalizing categories of capital. They might turn out to be driven by highly localized institutional dynamics, or be tied to other cultural practices, or be highly contingent outcomes of social conflict not connected to capital. Consequently, the main issue will not be whether or not they are products of capitalism, since they are not. It will be whether they are products of material social practices or are produced by dynamics internal to discourse or culture. In other words, what will be at stake is not the relevance of a Marxian framework, but rather the relevance of a materialist framework.

This means there is no presumption that a universalizing capitalism must
become the explanatory master key for every social phenomenon. It will be highly relevant for phenomena that are generated in channels one and two, but not in channel three. Where we find that a phenomenon falls into channel three, it is not in any way corrosive to the universalizing claims of the theory, for it is entirely consistent with the latter that a large range of practices will fall outside the theory's scope. These phenomena will have their own explanations, and what these are cannot be prejudged. As I suggested in the preceding paragraph, there is not even a presumption that the explanation must be a materialist one, at least not with respect to the proximate cause.

Chakrabarty is therefore quite wrong to maintain that practices that do not clearly fall in with prototypically "modern" ones must be a source of anxiety for universalizing theories. He holds that "modern historical consciousness"—that is to say, modes of thought influenced by "historicism"—feels a need to "construct a single historical context for everything" in order to explain it. Everything must be seen either as a direct result of some universalizing principle or as a holdover, an anachronism, that will sooner or later disappear. But it should be clear by now that Chakrabarty is mistaken. It is entirely consistent to affirm capital's universalization and also to accept the potential viability of traditional practices. In some cases, they might be reproduced because of their connection to capitalism, as in the case of workers who hold to their communal identities, examined in Chapters 6 and 8. In other cases, they will be independent of capital and have sources of their own, as with Chakrabarty's History 2. Even though both kinds of practices will be based on different foundations, in neither case must they be treated as anachronisms. A universalizing theory will be quite capable of accommodating these phenomena with its core commitments.

9.7 CONCLUSION

One of the central motivations of postcolonial studies is to analyze how the globalization of capital in the modern epoch has affected social dynamics in the East. A conventional view, promoted by Western theorists in the nineteenth century, was that as capitalism spread across the world, it subordinated an ever-expanding zone to its own principles, thereby exposing the populations within that zone to a common set of constraints and compulsions. The fact that these populations were now subjected to the same pressures, and often the same practices, was taken as grounds for placing them within a common analytical framework. This strategy was most famously deployed by Marx and his followers, but postcolonial theorists are correct in their surmise that its use extended far beyond the Marxists. The result was the creation of something like a global
historiography of capitalism. As Chakrabarty observes, under its auspices, the story of regions as diverse as modern India or Japan or Egypt could fall under the same broad category of the history of capital.

This is the view that Chakrabarty rejects in *Provincializing Europe*, on arguments that are, as I have shown in this chapter, built on a series of misconceptions. Once we correct for his foibles, it is revealed to be entirely legitimate to write a universal history of East and West—what Chakrabarty terms “capitalist history.” But this means nothing more than that in some of their practices, agents in Bombay, Nairobi, Detroit, and Cairo are all subjected to a common set of constraints.

Thus, I have defended both the success of a universalizing process and the utility of certain universal categories that map onto that process. The foundation for my defense of capitalism’s universalization is that it does not require the subordination of every social practice in order that it may occur. All it requires as a matter of necessity is a change in the specific social relations that govern economic reproduction. Of course, this involves a wide array of relations, many of which are not directly economic. But it also omits a vast array of practices. It is not that these more distal practices will be entirely unaffected by capitalist dynamics. They will feel some impact of the economic transformation, if only because of the central role of economic reproduction—for agents at a micro level, and for society at a macro level. The changes in this sphere will therefore radiate outward, implicating other relations in many ways. The point is, the nature and weight of their impact, as well as the direction of change, cannot be prejudged once we have moved away from the core activities.

It is therefore entirely reasonable to affirm what Chakrabarty denies—that once capitalism is in place, and so long as it remains in place, we know the constitutive principles that will govern social development. This is not a sign of an illicit determinism; it is a recognition of the real effects of certain social structures. Or, to put it differently, the theory is no more deterministic than reality.