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## Our Multifaceted World

### Contribution to GTI Forum [Big History and Great Transition](#)

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We are called to choose between two stories: that of a global Big History and that of a pluriversal history. The first is driven by a “grounded optimism”—that modernity’s achievements enable us to overcome the dangerous divisions of history. The second would instead tune us to “the relational ‘ingenuity’ of non-modern worlds” for guidance in the Anthropocene. Through the lens of his Big History, David Christian [argues](#) not for some simplistic modernism of inevitable progress, but for an emergence of a global solidarity ever more possible through planetwide transactions virtual and material. For him, those networks have a certain strength of futurity only as rooted in an evolutionary history that goes all the way back to the emergence of multicellular cooperation. In his [answer](#), Greg Anderson does not pitch for pessimism, but for an altogether different sense of human rootedness. He perceives globalization as the cause and continuous driver of the very problem it is being evoked to solve. It is the colonial conquest and uprooting of the rooted local communities, human and otherwise, that constitute modernity. If for Christian human history demonstrates our “exceptional capacity for collaboration,” for Anderson it is this human exceptionalism that is leading our history toward self-destruction.

My own work, at the edges of a discipline that barely counts as “modern,” comes in its specific pluralism aligned with the plurality of worlds making up any human world—material, cultural, religious, cosmic. To resist the monolith of modern civilization and its roots in an un-self-questioning monotheism, any solidarity that is not sliding toward homogenization will embrace—with multiple terminologies—a bioregional pluriverse. And such a solidarity seeks wisdom, as Anderson insists, in the “relational ingenuity of non-modern worlds, extinct and extant.” Those nonmodern worlds are largely indigenous and colonized. But, of course, Western

thought, and certainly theology, took a long time to get modern as well. We have no excuse not to recognize the relational alternative.

Anderson is not announcing the end of the world. But perhaps of *The World*. My own repeated meditations on the apocalypse—even the actual ancient text, not only the conflicting ways it plays out in Western and in secular, modern history—put me close to his insistent pluriverse. The term *apokalypsis* has nothing originally to do with “the end of the world.” It means “disclosure,” not closure.<sup>1</sup> In the biblical context, the revelation warns of collective catastrophe that precedes such world transformation. Catastrophe, not termination. Since then, many earth-worlds, of humans and other species, have already been eliminated. So I find illuminating Déborah Danowski and Eduardo Viveiros de Castro’s philosophical anthropology in *The Ends of the World*. From their Brazilian vantage point, they take on, with splendid irony, “the end of the world”... as “a seemingly interminable topic—at least, of course, until it happens.” Meditating on environmental catastrophe, they call for a “becoming indigenous, local and global, particular as well as general.”<sup>2</sup> Anderson’s relational pluralism reverberates with this meditation—and so against any “one-size-fits-all” globalization.

Note that Danowsky and Viveiros de Castro also insist upon the global. Indeed, through “the general,” they are making strong and indeed global arguments on behalf of the local. And I am not here content to simply vote *for* Anderson’s pluriverse *against* Christian’s globe. Christian does mean his Big History to support rather than replace the differences that make up our planetary existence. He does not in the present context sufficiently address the challenge and promise of difference. Yet I cannot help but appreciate the theological (indeed, Christian) resonance of his encouragement of “neighborly collaboration at the planetary scale.”

If I am honest to a decolonizing pluriversalism, I recognize that as a concept it relies on a counter-globalism: not an anti-globalism, but a sense of the planetary that counters the globalism of both colonial and neocolonial unity, and (as Christian only implies) that deconstructs the delusions of global progress upon which neoliberal capitalism depends. As the primary force of globalization in the world, this “one-size-fits-all” economics is threatening the life of the earth. So the notion of globality has lost all innocence. But that doesn’t mean it has lost all validity. If we subject it regularly, rhythmically, to the tests of an egalitarian interdependence—often of pressingly local

challenges of race, gender, sex, class, environment, and the “embarrassed, etc.”—we do find that local networks need the collaboration of transnational collectives.<sup>3</sup>

Such solidarities check the nativist, white nationalist, and isolationist temptations of the local, while countering the abstract detachment and capitalist attachment of the global. And then we might shape that precarious collectivity into an earth-renewing planetarity. A bit. A bit more. The globe is not erased but wrestled out of its abstract geometry into a geopolitics that sustains the planet’s plurisingular life—in the endlessly divergent and interlinked nature-cultures that texture the collective life of earthlings.<sup>4</sup> And that life must be addressed not only locally but also globally. ...through a multiplicity of local indigenities that may even need to include my twentieth-floor big city address.

If catastrophe—particularly as it bears down on us in the inhumanity of global warming—is to become catalyst, it will depend upon planetary networks that know that the end of the habitable world is a pressing and present possibility. But not a necessity. Not yet, we sigh. We might then avoid the deception of optimism and the despair of pessimism.<sup>5</sup> Hope, however, is not optimism. It lacks self-assurance, and it requires grief-work. It carries the ancient double-edge of prophetic rage against the powers and of the improbable “new heaven and earth.” A culmination of Big History? I would decapitalize (in both senses) that construct, acknowledge the temporal depth and multicultural immensity of the life of our species among the others, and recognize in it our gift both to poison (German “*Gift*”) and to wake up.

## Endnotes

1. Catherine Keller, *Facing Apocalypse: Climate, Democracy, and Other Last Chances* (Ossining, NY: Orbis Books, 2021).
2. Déborah Danowski and Eduardo Viveiros de Castro, *The Ends of the World* (Cambridge, UK: Polity, 2016), 122.
3. Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* (New York: Routledge, 1990).
4. Donna Haraway, *Staying with the Trouble: Making Kin in the Chthulucene* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2016).
5. Keller, *Facing Apocalypse*.

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## About the Author



Catherine Keller is Professor of Constructive Theology in the Graduate Division of Religion of Drew University. Her work on theology covers a spectrum of dimensions: ecofeminist, process, pluralist, political, and philosophical. Her books include *From a Broken Web: Separation, Sexism and Self*; *Political Theology of the Earth: Our Planetary Emergency and the Struggle for a New Public*; and *Facing Apocalypse: Climate, Democracy and Other Last Chances*. She is the co-editor of *Postcolonial Theologies, Common Good/s: Ecology, Economy and Political Theology*, and *Entangled Worlds: Religion, Science and the New Materialism*. She holds a PhD in the philosophy of religion and theology from Claremont Graduate School.

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