Critical Realism

The difference that it makes

Edited by
Justin Cruickshank

Routledge Studies in Critical Realism

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Critical Realism

This book introduces social scientists to the difference that critical realism can make to theorising and methodological problem-solving within the contemporary social sciences.

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- feminism
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- linguistics
- concept formation
- education policy
- immigration policy
- the scientific status of heterodox economics
- globalisation

Critical Realism will be a useful source for anyone interested in exploring how methodological unity can be achieved across the social sciences.

Justin Cruickshank is a lecturer in the philosophy and methodology of social science at Nottingham Trent University. He is the deputy editor of the *Journal of Critical Realism* and the author of *Realism and Sociology* (Routledge 2002).

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Edited by Margaret Archer, Roy Bhaskar, Andrew Collier, Tony Lawson and Alan Norrie

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Introduction[1]

Justin Cruickshank

Critical realism: a brief definition

What is critical realism? Critical realism is realist because it challenges the current postmodernist and social constructionist vogue. The key ideas of this vogue are as follows: first, that there is no rational self, and instead the self is a decentred contingency which cannot transcend its socio-historical location; and, secondly, that what is taken to be knowledge is a reflection of the prevailing discourse or language game. From this it is maintained that the task of the researcher is more about constructing a narrative than discovering the truth. This means that social scientists must use qualitative research to understand the reality constructed by the group studied, rather than claiming to discover the truth about a group. In constructing a narrative about the reality of the group studied, the social origin of the researcher will influence the narrative, and the outcome will be as much about the researcher's biography as the people studied. In which case, it may be best for the researcher to study people from the same social group, so that the origin of the researcher does not clash with the reality constructed by the group studied. It may also be maintained that research is always political, because any work undertaken will either reinforce the status quo by reproducing accepted views about a particular group, or challenge the status quo by offering up a radical narrative that challenges the prevailing image of the group.

Against this, critical realists argue that the self is not a decentred contingency. This does not necessarily entail the endorsement of a naïve realist view that the self is totally asocial and that it can have a direct access to reality. For critical realists the self is neither an asocial entity divorced from its socio-historical location with a fixed identity, nor a contingent epiphenomenon that is reducible to the prevailing norms of a society or community. Rather, selfhood is to be understood in terms of an ongoing process, whereby selfhood is socially mediated but not socially determined. Critical realists also argue that the self can obtain knowledge of a reality that is separate from our representations of it. This does not mean that we have a direct access to a manifest truth, but instead it means that we have access to reality via fallible theories. This view of knowledge holds that there is an objective reality, and instead of hoping that one day we will somehow have

absolute knowledge, the expectation is that knowledge claims will continue to be better interpretations of reality. As knowledge claims are fallible, the best we can do is improve our interpretations of reality, rather than seek a definitive, finished 'Truth'.

As critical realists are not naïve realists they cannot accept the positivistic and more restrictive ethnographic positions concerning quantitative and qualitative methods, respectively. This means that critical realists reject the view that variables can mirror facts and that correlations between variables are to be taken as causal relations. For critical realists variables are always conceptual interpretations, and correlations are descriptions rather than causal explanations in themselves. Correlations between variables are taken as descriptions rather than explanations in themselves because for critical realists correlations between variables are contingent effects of underlying casual processes. Thus to note a correlation between voting and social class, for example, is not to explain a causal relationship, but to describe an event in need of further explanation. Such an explanation would have to explore how class was defined, how people (mis)perceived their material interests, what non-material factors influenced voting, and so on.

However, naïve realism need not be restricted to (the positivistic approach to) quantitative methods. There can be a naïve realism with regard to qualitative methods, which would hold that the researcher moves from 'facts' in themselves to theory. This would be the position endorsed by a restrictive kind of ethnography, an ethnography that wanted to maintain a clear divide between theory and empirical research, with the researcher restricting themselves to facts about individuals during the course of empirical research. The idea of starting with a theory would be rejected on the grounds that this would prejudice the researcher and do conceptual violence to the people studied. Against the view that we can start with the 'raw data' and then work our way up to a theory to explain the putative facts, critical realists would argue that the research was, from the very start, influenced by assumptions. In other words, the putative raw data would be concept-dependent during its collection. The most important assumptions or concepts influencing the compilation of data would be ontological assumptions concerning structure and agency. The reason why such assumptions are the most important is that social scientific research is concerned with exploring how individuals' agency is influenced by the social context, and therefore there will be assumptions concerning the extent to which individuals had free will, to what extent individuals were constrained by structures, how different individuals were enabled and constrained by the social context in different ways, and so forth. In which case, what is required is a theory to explain how structure can influence agency. This is needed to avoid the problems of overemphasising agency, overemphasising structure, or arbitrarily overemphasising both in one piece of research.

By starting with a theory that links structure and agency, one may engage in empirical research without erroneously assuming that one has direct access to reality in the form of causal relations or raw data about individuals. Furthermore, by starting with such a theory one would avoid producing research that failed to

explain adequately how structures mediated–but did not determine–individuals' agency. This does not mean that critical realists think that empirical data ought to be cut to fit the theory. In developing a definition of structures critical realists are not saying that they have knowledge of specific structures. Rather, critical realists are seeking to provide a general theory–or 'meta-theory'–that can supply some guiding precepts about structure and agency. This means that it is the task of the individual researcher to develop specific theories in the course of their empirical research. In developing such theories, researchers will be informed by the general precepts concerning structures (which means defining structures as emergent properties), but the construction of the specific theories will depend upon the specifics of the topic being researched.

Thus, critical realism is realist because it holds, *contra* postmodernism and social constructionism, that research is about gaining knowledge of a reality that exists independently of our representations of it. It was mentioned that critical realism was not a naïve realism, but why then is it critical? Critical realism is critical, as regards methodology, because it holds that the concepts which inform the meta-theory that defines structure and agency can only be developed via a critical dialogue with alternative social ontologies. From an immanent critique of various other positions that try to put the emphasis on structure, on agency, or link structure and agency, critical realists argue: (a) that structure and agency need to be linked, and that we must avoid putting all the explanatory weight on structures or individuals, as this results in determinism and an inability to explain individuals' social relations, respectively; and (b) that the notion of emergent properties provides the best definition of structures, which allows us to avoid the view that structures determine agents. That is to say, critical realists explored to what extent other ontological positions were tenable according to their own terms of reference and, from this, it was argued that structure and agency need to be linked, and linked via the notion of emergent properties. Viewing social structures as emergent properties means arguing that structures were created by the actions of individuals in the past, and now have causal properties in their own right.

Critical realism is also critical in a political as well as a methodological sense. For many critical realists the task of research is to enable the move from facts to values. That is, the task of empirical research is to explore how existing social, political and economic relations create inequality, and turn on exploitation, in order to develop a normative critique against those relations. Research is used to provide the facts about hardship and exploitation, and from such facts normative and political arguments may be developed against the status quo.

So, critical realism can make a difference to social science with regard to both methodological and political issues. As regards methodology, critical realists stress the need for a social ontology linking structure and agency (via the notion of emergent properties) to guide empirical research. This is especially important now that many researchers are breaking from positivism and a more restrictive ethnography to argue for a mixture of methods and the linkage of theory and method. With such a turn to methodological pluralism, and the recognition that theory and methods ought to be linked, there is a need for a theory, or

meta-theory, that can guide empirical research by supplying the ontological precepts necessary to inform research. While specific theories may be developed during the course of empirical research, a meta-theory is needed to inform this, so as to avoid erroneous explanations of the relationship between individuals and the social context in which they are situated. Critical realism also makes a difference as regards politics because many critical realists hold that research into how structures influence agency will show that the existing structures are exploitative. It is then maintained that the task of the researcher is to make a difference by engaging in political argument in order to challenge these structures.

Overview of the chapters

The chapters in this book are divided into four parts, each of which pertains to the issues sketched out above. The part titles are as follows:

- The self: method and ethics
- Social science and critique after the linguistic turn
- Method, politics and policy
- Political economy and globalism

The self: method and ethics

Archer, in 'The private life of the social agent: what difference does it make?', develops her social ontology from structures (structural emergent properties, or SEPs) and culture (cultural emergent properties, or CEPs) to give a detailed account of people's emergent properties (PEPs). If the structure-agency problem can begin to be resolved by defining structures (and culture) as emergent properties, then it is incumbent to say how we may define agents from a realist perspective– and to do so in a way that avoids positing an asocial and ahistorical essence.

Archer starts with an immanent critique of 'Modernity's Man' and 'Society's Being', ontologies of human being which hold that human being is to be understood as an asocial essence (definable in terms of instrumental rationality), or a contingent social construct, respectively Archer then moves on to argue for an ontology of human being that shows: (a) how human being is socially mediated, but irreducible to social norms; and (b) how any account of human being must include emotional and normative factors as well as any reference to rationality. Central to this conception of human being is what Archer refers to as the 'inner dialogue'. It is the inner dialogue that mediates social and personal factors, together with emotional and rational factors. Such a model of human being makes a difference to sociological research because it holds that we need to understand the inner dialogue of agents to understand how agents are conditioned by, and respond to, the enablements and constraints that they face, which in turn are furnished by the prevailing SEP's and CEP's.

This means that qualitative research is essential for any substantive sociological inquiry into how structure and agency are interrelated. Implicit in Archer's argument is the rejection of the inductive approach in qualitative research: instead of starting with qualitative data and then trying to develop a theory to interpret the 'facts', we need to start with a theory, of SEPs, CEPs and, of course, PEPs. We need to start with such a theory because we have no theory-neutral access to the world and so we need to make explicit the meta-level assumptions that inform our approach. We need to understand where 'we are coming from' to make sense of how the conclusions we draw from empirical research are framed within particular ontological assumptions about how social reality is constituted.

In their chapter 'Are critical realist ethics foundationalist?', Hostettler and Norrie argue that Bhaskar's transcendental dialectical critical realism, which is the point in Bhaskar's philosophy where Bhaskar starts to discuss the soul, goes against his earlier philosophy, the philosophy of critical realism, and the later version of this as dialectical critical realism. This is because Bhaskar's work on the soul swings the emphasis away from the socio-historical influences on agents' identity and capacity for action to an ahistorical essence. They argue that, in *From East To West* (Routledge 2000), Bhaskar gives us a philosophical anthropology that makes social and historical factors epiphenomenal, and which seeks to base ethical, political and normative argument upon an ahistorical foundation, furnished by an ontology of human being, understood in terms of a transcendental essence, viz. the soul. Hostettler and Norrie argue that a return to critical realism, and dialectical critical realism, would place human being within socio-historical processes, and allow for the critique of existing political arrangements in terms of how they negatively affect existing human relations.

Social science and critique after the linguistic turn

Twentieth-century philosophy, and much social theory, has been marked by the turn to language. In what may be broadly termed 'analytic philosophy', arguments centred around such topics as protocol sentences, whether or not philosophical problems arise only as a result of the misuse of language, and how propositions might correspond to facts. In what may be called 'continental philosophy', the emphasis was not on arguing about how language might represent the world, but on how language constructs the identity of the (putative) knowing subject, and how language cannot represent, or correspond to, non-language (that is, extra-discursive facts), meaning that 'truth' was socially constructed.

New, in her chapter 'Feminism, critical realism and the linguistic turn', argues that contemporary feminism has been undermined because many feminists have followed the linguistic turn, and adopted social constructionist positions concerning the self and truth. Although 'second-wave feminism' may have been legitimately criticised for universalising the views of white, middle-class Western women, the reaction to this which stresses difference and contingency undermines feminism,

according to New, because it focuses on socially constructed difference, rather than real harm.

New argues that claims to truth, especially truth claims about 'womanhood' or the female sex, are seen as innately conservative by those feminists who have taken the linguistic turn to embrace difference. Such feminists argue that truth claims try to locate fixed essences which, in the case of sex and gender, means arguing that women have a fixed essence, and such arguments are conservative because the implication must be that the status quo reflects this essence. Against this, feminists who regard themselves as postmodern, post-structuralist, deconstructionist, and social constructionist argue that we need to show how essentialist language forces difference into preset categories that serve to protect the status quo, and which cannot mirror essences, as language cannot mirror facts. By stressing that meaning is always deferred because language cannot mirror facts, and that language can only construct partial and ambiguous 'discourses', such feminists believe that conservative patriarchal positions can be attacked and social diversity celebrated.

Against this New argues that there is a reality beyond discourse (which we can know via fallible theories) and that women as a *real* group do have some universal interests, despite the reality of heterogeneity, and that these need to be argued for. New considers the example of forced sex. She discusses how, in a culture that has no concept of rape, a woman who was subject to rape suffered very real harmful consequences.

This leads New to argue that we need 'explanatory critiques' which enable us to move from facts to values. Explanatory critiques are argued for by many critical realists, and the position is that an accurate explanation of certain social relations may lead to a normative conclusion that criticises those relations—for promoting a distorted, ideological conception of the world, or for harming people. Feminism, argues New, needs a critical realist explanatory critique, whereby research into gender inequality will allow us to criticise patriarchal relations, by saying it is true that such relations harm women, who are a real group with real interests, rather than turning to language and culture to embrace socially constructed differences.

None of this implies that critical realists are unaware of the constructive role of language in concept formation. López, in his chapter 'Critical realism: the difference it makes, in theory', discusses the language-borne nature of theoretical practice. López argues that metaphors play an important generative role in both the natural and social sciences. He stresses that metaphors ought not to be regarded atomistically and instrumentally with, say, one metaphor helping us understand one discrete aspect of reality. Rather, we need to recognise that in drawing upon metaphors we are drawing upon the world-view—and its associated practices—of a different discipline, which will in turn carry its assumptions over into the new discipline.

López makes this argument with regard to the development of meta-theory, the general precepts that inform the construction of specific theories in the course of empirical research. He is therefore arguing that meta-theory is

developed not just through an immanent critique of existing terms of reference, but also through an engagement with different terms of reference, which may draw upon the metaphors within the other terms of reference to help frame and answer problems. This is not to adopt the constructionist view that language constructs the truth we adopt and the reality we seek to know, but it is to make us aware of the constructive role of language in developing meta-theory to inform natural and social scientific practice, and to disabuse us of the view of language as some sort of 'mirror'. None of which is to suggest that language 'floats free' from reality, as language can help science gain knowledge of the world.

Explaining the acquisition of language by reference to an innate biological capacity may seem to be realist, and a good way to reject the post-structuralist and social constructionist views that the 'I' is a 'grammatical fiction', constructed by a particular use of language but with no extra-linguistic referent. If we were able to explain language acquisition in terms of an innate capacity then there would be no truck with the attempt to reduce the self to socially contingent linguistic constructs. In the chapter 'Critical realism and scientific method in Chomsky's linguistics', Jones takes issue with this innate capacity explanation of language acquisition.

Chomsky argues that language cannot be acquired inductively, because one's experiences underdetermine the attempt to link language with set practices; or, to put it another way, language is used in such a rich variety of ways, one would be unable to become a competent language user by trying to link a discrete fact or practice to a set use of a word. This leads Chomsky to posit the existence of an innate faculty for language acquisition which he calls 'universal grammar'. Similarly, the semantic content is, like the grammatical form, to be explained in terms of innate faculties. As Jones notes, according to Chomsky's argument meanings are not learned but are innate and 'awakened' through experience. Indeed, every form of language use is to be explained in terms of innate faculties, so that technical scientific and mathematical concepts are explainable via reference to an innate 'science-forming faculty'.

Some critical realists, as Jones notes, have been attracted to Chomskyan linguistics, believing that it provides a critical realist scientific theory by avoiding positivist accounts of language acquisition (in terms of induction), and by making reference to generative mechanisms that underlie observed events. Jones rejects this, arguing that Chomsky gives us a biologised version of Cartesian rationalism, whereby the knowing subject has knowledge by virtue of innate faculties (rather than a priori ideas). This is incorrect, according to Jones, because it sets up a dualism between the brain and the world, the consequence being that 'knowledge' expresses the innate aspects of the brain rather than grasping the world beyond. This leads Jones to argue that Chomsky is giving us a version of 'central state materialism', which cannot explain how the determined brain manages to engage with the world without assuming a form of parallelism, whereby the determined brain and the world happen to be arranged in some form of synchrony. In which case, Jones argues, as Chomsky does not make

reference to God to explain this parallelism, it is a matter of luck if the science-forming capacity happens to tell us anything about the world (although, of course, we would never be in a position to know if what we took to be knowledge was true or not).

In short, Chomsky's theory is not scientific because it makes a dogmatic reference to essential properties (innate faculties) that cannot be shown to exist scientifically and which, moreover, precludes the possibility of science by precluding the possibility of knowledge being about the world rather than the brain. At the root of this, Jones explains, is the epistemic fallacy, whereby Chomsky is trying to tell us how knowledge is acquired and then using such explanations to frame and answer ontological questions about the nature of reality. Against this, Jones argues, a critical realist linguistics would seek to explore how language acquisition and use was social. This is not to enter social constructionism, however, because Jones recognises that language-use abilities have biological origins. Nevertheless, language use is emergent from its biological origins and needs to be understood scientifically in terms of how individuals are affected by social relations and practices.

Method, politics and policy

Some critics hold that if one tried to use a critical realist social ontology of emergent properties, then one would produce a circular argument. According to such a view, the phenomena to be explained would be explained using realist terms of reference, thus verifying the existence of emergent properties by describing observed events as emergent properties. To avoid such a possibility, I argue in the chapter 'Underlabouring and unemployment: notes for developing a critical realist approach to the agency of the chronically unemployed' that it is necessary to develop what I refer to as a 'domain-specific meta-theory'. A domain-specific meta-theory may be developed by engaging in an immanent critique of the existing terms of reference that deal with a substantive research topic. The general realist theory of social reality is then drawn upon to help overcome difficulties in conceptualising issues concerning how individuals are enabled and constrained. Note, though, that this does not mean that the critical realist general ontology—of SEPs (structural emergent properties), CEPs (cultural emergent properties) and PEPs (people's emergent properties)—is taken as an infallible theory. It may well be the case that an alternative ontology is developed in the future. The two key points to note, therefore, are that: (i) the general ontology should not be applied directly to the development of specific theories in empirical research, but via a domain-specific meta-theory; and (ii) that the general ontology may be revised if an immanent critique of alternative substantive theories reveals those theories to have a meta-theory that is more useful that the one currently used by critical realists.

This argument is made in relation to debates about the agency of the chronically unemployed. Various positions on this issue are subjected to immanent critique, and the preliminary content of a domain-specific meta-theory,

to guide research into the agency of the chronically unemployed, is sketched out. In developing this domain-specific meta-theory, Archer's ontology of SEPs, CEPs and PEPs is drawn upon, and complemented with the concepts of inter- and intra-agent network-specific emergent properties. These concepts are applied to the qualitative studies carried out by Campbell and MacDonald, which are rich in information but compromised by ontological ambiguity and an implicit methodological individualism, respectively. While the research undertaken by MacDonald is hostile to neo-liberal politics, which blames unemployed people for being unemployed (casting them as the 'something for nothing' element), the implicit methodological individualism is compatible with such a politics. This is because his terms of reference rely solely on individuals and their ways of coping. There is no discussion of structures as such, but only of individuals who succeed and individuals who fail to do so well.

Turning from qualitative to quantitative research, Willmott, in his chapter 'New Labour, school effectiveness and ideological commitment', argues that the education policy of New Labour, which draws upon School Effectiveness Research (SER), is driven by a commitment to a neo-liberal emphasis on markets. The education policy of New Labour, observes Willmott, is concerned with measuring 'objective' standards, so that parents can select the best service provider in the education market. This is seen by those who support New Labour as pragmatic rather than ideological. However, Willmott argues that it is ideological because education cannot be treated as a market abstracted from the social context, whereby performance can be objectively measured statistically via SER. Willmott's point here is that while School Effectiveness (SE) researchers may not be committed to neo-liberal ideology, their use of quantitative methods to measure performance is contingently compatible with the neo-liberal emphasis on markets, because both have an atomistic social ontology that denies the social context any effective role in influencing events.

In the chapter 'What race means to realists', Carter also takes issue with the way in which quantitative methods have been used to devise and implement policy decisions. Specifically, Carter is concerned with criticising the use of quantitative methods in 'transracial adoption' (TRA). TRA (which occurs mostly in the USA) takes race as a variable, defining race in terms of skin colour, and then seeks to establish causal relations by noting correlations between the 'race' of children adopted and the 'race' of the adopters. From this it is argued that same-'race' adoptions are more successful, because a correlation exists between adopters retaining the child adopted if all the individuals concerned are from the same (putative) race. Against this Carter argues that the variables are (crude) interpretations of a complex social reality, and that correlations cannot serve as indicators of causal relations in themselves. Carter argues that research ought to eschew making casual inferences from statistical data, and instead study how different carers are affected by different CEPs, and how this affects relations with the adoptee. Here research would be seeking knowledge of the underlying causal

mechanisms that affected individuals' agency, rather than conflating causality into statistical correlations that were abstracted from the social context.

Prior to discussing TRA, Carter discusses post-war immigration policy in the UK. His argument is that a culture (CEP) of racism contradicted an economic (SEP) need for labour. Here Carter illustrates the point that emergent properties may exist in a contradictory relationship to one another, with the outcomes being contingent upon the changing ways that contradictory emergent properties interact. Given this, empirical research cannot base causal explanations upon correlations between statistical variables because this would be to mistake contingent effects for relations of cause and effect.

Moving on from the political implications of certain empirical methods, and the problems associated with using quantitative methods to guide political policy, MacLennan and Thomas argue that social science ought to furnish a radical critique of existing structural relations. For them, social scientists ought not to try to overcome the problems associated with a positivistic use of quantitative data in order to develop better policy decisions. Rather, they take a more radical view, rejecting the notion that the researcher ought to help government policy formulation. In their chapter 'Cultural studies: towards a realist intervention', MacLennan and Thomas take issue with the 'policy turn' in cultural studies, which is defined in terms of political 'realism', or the abandonment of critique and the embracing of pro-capitalist policies and values. The authors note that this loss of political focus, combined with the New Right assault on higher education, resulted in some key cultural studies figures (in Australia) embracing a 'pragmatic' conception of cultural studies, which meant becoming involved with government and the 'new economy' of the 'new media'.

Against the policy turn, MacLennan and Thomas argue for a critical realist intervention in cultural studies. Such an intervention would draw upon the conceptual resources of critical realism to do the following: explore how cultural representations might function as ideological vehicles; reject the social constructionist turn in cultural studies, which fails to explain power because it draws upon a neo-Nietzschean view of power as ubiquitous that cannot explain how ideologies function to protect the interests of the rich and powerful; and criticise the uncritical celebration of popular culture. The key point here is that it is a postmodern/social constructionist relativism, rather than a positivism based upon quantitative methods, that serves a neo-liberal political agenda. That is, the policy turn in cultural studies embraced postmodernism to celebrate fleeting images and, in doing so, any notion of making truth claims about underlying structures creating inequality, and being supported by ideological imagery, is abandoned. Replacing critique with a celebration of diverse images helped the policy turn because the role of the intellectual was to assist the creative industries, and not to explore issues of inequality and exploitation.

Political economy and globalism

In the discipline of economics, those economists who adhere to the orthodox view hold that economics can only be scientific if it uses a deductive method based on mathematical modelling. Such a method, it is claimed, can yield scientific predictive knowledge. The starting point is the method and not the reality that one seeks to study: reality is cut to fit the method. In his chapter 'Naturalism and economics', Lewis takes issue with orthodox economics and argues for the methodological usefulness of a critical realist ontology. His argument is that the deductive method cannot be used to furnish causal explanations because it presumes a closed system whereby measured regularities are taken to be synonymous with causal mechanisms. Lewis continues by arguing for a contingent naturalism, according to which the social sciences are able to use the same method as the natural sciences not because of some prior methodological commitment but because the object of study is similar.

If we start with the object of study, and say that it happens that both the natural and the social world are constituted by emergent properties in open systems, then it follows that both the natural and social sciences ought to use the same methodology–of seeking to explain emergent properties in open systems. The naturalism, or unity of method, is therefore contingent upon the object of study, and not some fiat about a method being 'scientific'. Given a critical realist naturalism, the meta-theory of emergent properties in open systems might be used as an underlabourer (that is, a philosophical guide) to reject the erroneous deductive method, and its closed systems ontology, and to supply some general terms of reference to assist the development of heterodox economic theories. Lewis argues that using a critical realist meta-theory would enable heterodox economists to challenge the orthodox argument that heterodox economics is unscientific, by presenting an alternative–and stronger–account of science.

Patomäki, in the chapter 'A critical realist approach to global political economy', argues that the neo-Gramscianism 'world political economy' (WPE) approach was successful in overcoming the shortcomings of the other main approaches to international political economy. However, the WPE approach was subsequently challenged by another neo-Gramscian approach, called 'global political economy' (GPE). GPE, unlike WPE, argued that political economy needed to include reference to factors other than collective (political) agents, such as underlying socio-economic processes, including relations of production. Patomäki argues that critical realism can make a difference to GPE by building bridges between it and heterodox economics (to overcome the lack of economic theory proper in GPE), and by refining ontological terms of reference relating to causality, explanation and method.

For Patomäki, critical realism can underlabour in a way that encompasses normative conclusions as well as methodological issues. He argues that critical realism can enable the drawing of normative conclusions from factual premises. In this context, this means showing how orthodox economic approaches support neo-liberal ideology; how neo-liberalism (and classical economics) produce false

conceptions of socio-economic reality; how policies which seek to promote global 'free trade', which neo-liberalism justifies, are harmful; and how global laissez-faire, together with neoliberalism, need to be rejected because they are harmful and false.

In her chapter 'Explaining global poverty: a realist critique of the orthodox approach', Gruffydd Jones takes issue with the neo-liberal account of world poverty. For those committed to neo-liberalism, poverty is defined in terms of a lack of access to certain resources. Access to resources is measured statistically, allowing poverty to be 'objectively' measured, and can be improved via economic globalisation–the extension of free trade to parts of the globe suffering from chronic poverty. With such economic globalisation, it is argued, poverty can be overcome when poorer countries sell commodities that fetch a high price on the world market. Thus, the move from poverty to economic well-being can be measured statistically.

Against this, Gruffydd Jones argues that the positivist definition of poverty–as resources that can be measured statistically–fails to grasp how capitalist structures cause poverty and exploitation. The positivist, or 'orthodox', conception of poverty fails to explore how socio-economic relations create and perpetuate severe inequality. Instead, it simply offers a statistical list of resources with no explanation about how inequality was created in the first place and how free trade benefits richer countries. Gruffydd Jones also argues that it is impossible for capitalism to meet people's needs: even if free trade were able to make poor countries richer rather than poorer, people would still be unfulfilled because capitalist socio-economic relations exploit people.

Suggested introductory reading on critical realism[2]

For those new to critical realism it may be best to start with Andrew Collier's *Critical Realism: An Introduction to Roy Bhaskar's Philosophy* (Verso 1994). This book sets out Bhaskar's critical realist approach to the philosophy of natural science and social science in a clear and comprehensive way. It covers critical realism (CR) rather than Bhaskar's later work, which is known as dialectical critical realism (DCR) and transcendental dialectical critical realism (TDCR). There is no introductory guide (at present) to DCR or TDCR, and so to approach these aspects of realism, which have had far less impact than the original CR, the best option would be to start with Part IV of *Critical Realism: Essential Readings* (Routledge 1998), edited by Margaret Archer *et al.;* the most useful chapters would be the 'Introduction' and the two chapters by Andrew Collier (Chapters 25 and 26).

For philosophical arguments against relativism, and for the metaphysical realist claim that reality is not reducible to perspectives, see Roger Trigg's *Reality at Risk: A Defence of Realism in Philosophy and the Sciences* (2nd edition, Harvester Wheatsheaf 1980). Trigg is not a critical realist, but he defends the metaphysical realist conception of reality that is drawn upon by critical realists. Whereas critical realists tend to focus on developing a substantive (but fallible) theory of reality (which

defines reality in terms of emergent properties in open systems), Trigg is more concerned with arguing for the notion of a reality beyond our representations of it. If we are to make sense of science and protect rationality, argues Trigg, then such a reality is needed in order to attack anti-realist arguments that invoke relativism, which in turn makes science pointless and destroys rationality. In *Realism and Social Science* (Sage 2002), Andrew Sayer takes up the task of contrasting postmodernism with critical realism (see, in particular, Part II). Sayer presents lucid arguments against postmodern relativism, and shows how the charge against critical realism–that it seeks to have absolute knowledge–is ill-founded. In Chapter 4, Sayer makes a very useful distinction between 'essentialism' and the existence of some form of essential properties, arguing that the latter is something that social science can explain, while the former is an incorrect approach. This distinction allows Sayer to rebut the argument that critical realism is a form of essentialism that seeks absolute knowledge. The 'General introduction' to *After Postmodernism: An Introduction to Critical Realism* (Continuum 2000), edited by José López and Garry Potter, is also a useful introduction to the relationship between postmodernism, critical realism and social science.

For critical realism and its relationship to empirical research, Andrew Sayer's book *Method in Social Science: A Realist Approach* (2nd edition, Routledge 1994) serves as a good introduction to the key methodological issues, especially the relationship between critical realism and quantitative methods. See also the chapter by Tony Lawson in *Critical Realism: Essential Readings* (Routledge 1998: Chapter 6), which deals with the issue of how social science can be possible without experimental closure.

In their book *Realistic Evaluation* (Sage 1998), Ray Pawson and Nick Tilley take a realist approach to research. Although they are not critical realists as such, their book does overlap with critical realism insofar as it argues that quantitative data does not give a direct access to causal relations in the form of regularities occurring between variables. Rather, Pawson and Tilley argue that research needs to understand how different mechanisms will operate in different ways in different contexts, with mechanisms not being synonymous with correlations between variables.

For the use of critical realism within ethnographic work, see Sam Porter's articles 'Critical realist ethnography: the case of racism and professionalism in a medical setting' (1993, *Sociology* 27(4):591–609) and 'Contra-Foucault: soldiers, nurses, and power' (1996, *Sociology* 30(1):59–78). In both pieces Porter combines a critical realist ontology with qualitative research, rejecting the 'inductive' approach that moves from data to theory, and showing the practical benefits of using a critical realist meta-theory as an underlabourer for ethnographic research.

On the issue of explanatory critiques, and the realist position on the fact-value argument, the best place to start is with Chapter 6 of Collier's *Critical Realism: An Introduction to Roy Bhaskar's Philosophy,* and the chapter by Bhaskar and Collier in *Critical Realism: Essential Readings* (Chapter 15) on explanatory critiques. Chapters 7 and 8 in Sayer's *Realism and Social Science* provide a good introduction, not only to the fact-value argument in critical realism but also to the whole issue of how a

critical social science can be conceptualised in a way that links abstract argument with substantive social and political issues.

Notes

1 See the end of this introduction for suggested introductory reading on critical realism.
2 The term 'critical realism' was not coined by Bhaskar, but was a term developed by some followers of his work, and Bhaskar came to adopt the term. The term critical realism was originally coined in the 1920s by a group of US realist philosophers, the most important of whom were G.Santayana, R.W.Sellars and A.O.Lovejoy These philosophers argued against the naïve realist theory of perception, and also against idealism.

Part I

The self: method and ethics

1 The private life of the social agent

What difference does it make?[1]

Margaret S.Archer

As realism gains ground in social theory, it seems fair to admit that it has made a greater contribution to the re-conceptualisation of structure than it has to that of agency. However, if the 'problem of structure and agency' is to be resolved, then equivalent attention has to be given to both terms. Moreover, realism's stratified ontology, which has proved so useful in delineating the properties and powers that emerge at different levels of social structure, is just as pertinent to agency. This is what will be examined here. Specifically, it is those strata that pertain to every mature social agent, namely 'selfhood', 'personal identity' and 'social identity', which will be the focus of attention.[2] The implications of distinguishing these different personal emergent properties (PEPs) will be discussed throughout in relation to other theories that fail to make these distinctions. What difference a realist approach to agency makes to social investigation will be indicated in the conclusion.

There are two aspects to the 'problem of agency', and both are fundamental. *Technically,* the central problem of agency is to conceptualise the human agent as someone who is both partly formed by their sociality, but who also has the capacity partly to transform their society. *Morally,* the problem is to put forward a model that is *recognisably human;* one that retains Arendt's notion of the 'Human Condition' as entailing a reflexive 'Life of the Mind'. As agents, we are what Charles Taylor (1985:65) calls 'strong evaluators', and this must be recognised; for we do not take a detached, third-person, scientific stance to our own lives or to our societies.

Basically, I argue that two 'models of man' have dominated social theorising for the past two hundred years, and that neither can cope with the technical or moral problems raised by the 'problem of agency'.[3] These models can be called 'Modernity's Man' and 'Society's Being'.

In cameo, the Enlightenment allowed the 'Death of God' to issue in titanic man. With the secularisation of modernity went a progressive endorsement of human self-determination, of people's powers to come to know the world, master their environment and thus to control their own destiny as the 'measure of all things'. As the heritage of the Enlightenment tradition, Modernity's Man was a model which had stripped down the human being until he had one property alone, that of instrumental rationality, namely the capacity to maximise his

preferences through means-ends relationships and so to optimise his utility. In this model, *Homo economicus* stood forth as the lone, atomistic and opportunistic bargain-hunter–a completely impoverished model of man.

Technically, what this model of man could not deal with were phenomena like voluntary collective behaviour, leading to the creation of public goods; normative behaviour, when *Homo economicus* recognises his dependence upon others for his own welfare; and, finally, expressive solidarity, a willingness to share, or altruism. Crucially, this model could not cope with the human moral capacity to transcend instrumental rationality and to have 'ultimate concerns'. These are concerns that are not a means to anything beyond them, but are commitments, which are constitutive of who we are and an expression of our identities. Who we are is a matter of what we care about most. This is what makes us moral beings. None of this caring can be impoverished by reducing it to an instrumental means-ends relationship, which is presumed to leave us 'better off' relative to some indeterminate notion of future 'utility'.

Nevertheless, this was the model of man which was eagerly seized upon by social contract theorists in politics, utilitarians in ethics and social policy, and liberals in political economy. *Homo economicus* is a survivor. He lives on not only as the anchorman of microeconomics and the hero of neo-liberalism, but also as a colonial adventurer and, in the hands of rational choice theorists, he bids to conquer social science in general. As Gary Becker outlines this mission, '[t]he economic approach is a comprehensive one that is applicable to all human behaviour' (1976:8).

The rise of postmodernism during the last two decades represented a virulent rejection of Modernity's Man, but it spilt over into the dissolution of the human subject and a corresponding inflation of the importance of society. The 'Death of Man' joined the 'Death of God'. Now, in Lyotard's words, 'a *self* does not amount to much' (1984:15), and in Rorty's follow-up, '[s]ocialisation […] goes all the way down' (1989:185). To give humankind this epiphenomenal status necessarily deflects all real interest onto the forces of socialisation, as in every version of social constructionism. People are indeed perfectly uninteresting if they possess no personal powers which can make a difference to shaping their own lives or their own society. Consequently, to Foucault, '[m]an would be erased, like a face drawn in sand at the edge of the sea' (1970:387).

Society's Being is social constructionism's contribution to the debate, which presents our entire human properties and powers, beyond our biological constitution, as the gift of society. Our selfhood is a grammatical fiction, a product of learning to master the first-person pronoun system, and thus quite simply a theory of the self which is appropriated from society. As Harré puts it, '[a] person is not a natural object, but a cultural artefact' (1983:20). We are nothing beyond what society makes us, and it makes us what we are through our joining 'society's conversation'. Society's Being thus impoverishes humanity, by subtracting from our human powers and accrediting all of them–selfhood, reflexivity, thought, memory, emotionality and belief–to society's discourse.

What makes actors act has now become an urgent question within constructionism, because the answer cannot ever be given in terms of people themselves, who have neither the human resources to pursue their own aims nor the capacity to find reasons good if they are not in social currency. Effectively, this means that the constructionists' agent can only be moved by reasons *appropriated* from society, and thus is basically a *conventionalist*. The human dilemma has been eliminated from the human condition.

Reclaiming the human agent

It is maintained that the most basic of our human powers, beyond our biology, is our 'selfhood'—a *continuous sense of self* or reflexive self-consciousness. Even the two defective models need it. Society's Being requires this sense of self in order for a social agent to know that social obligations pertain to her, rather than just being diffuse expectations which would have no takers, and that when they clash, it is she who is put on a spot. Equally, Modernity's Man needs this sense of self if he is consistently to pursue his preference schedule, for he has to know both that they are his preferences and also how he is doing in maximising them over time.

To the social realist, relations between humanity and the world are intrinsic to the development of human properties, all of which exist only *in potentia,* yet are *necessary* conditions for social life itself. Thus, I am advancing a transcendental argument, for the necessity of a *sense of self* to the existence of society. The continuity of consciousness, meaning a continuous *sense of self,* was first advanced by Locke.[4] To defend it entails maintaining the crucial distinction between the evolving *concept* of self (which is indeed social) and the universal *sense* of self (which is not). This distinction has been upheld by certain anthropologists, such as Marcel Mauss (1989:3), to whom the universal sense of 'the "self" (Moi) is everywhere present'. This constant element consists in the fact that 'there has never existed a human being who has not been aware, not only of his body but also of his individuality, both spiritual and physical' (1989:3). However, there has been a persistent tendency in the social sciences to absorb the *sense* into the *concept,* and thus to credit what is universal to the cultural balance sheet.

The best way of showing that the distinction should be maintained is through a demonstration of its necessity—namely, that a *sense of self* must be distinct from social variations in *concepts of selves* because society would be unable to work without people who have a continuity of consciousness. Thus, for anyone to appropriate social expectations, it is necessary for them to have a *sense of self* upon which these impinge, to the extent that they recognise what is expected of them (otherwise obligations cannot be internalised).

Hence, for example, the individual Zuni has to sense that his two given names, one for Summer and one for Winter, apply to the *same* self, which is also the rightful successor of the ancestor who is held to live again in the body of each who bears his names. Correct appropriation (by the proper man for all seasons) is dependent upon a continuity of consciousness, which is an integral part of

what we mean by selfhood. No generalised social belief in ancestral reincarnation will suffice; for unless there is a self which (pro)claims *I* am *that* ancestor, then the belief which is held to be general turns out to be one which has no actual takers! Nor is this situation improved by vague talk about 'social pressures' to enact roles or assume genealogical responsibilities. On the contrary; this is incoherent. For it boils down to meaning that everyone knows what roles should be filled, but no one has enough of a *sense of self* to feel that these expectations apply to them. The implication for society is that nothing gets done, for without selves which sense that responsibilities are their own and which also own expectations, then the latter have all the force of the complaint that 'someone ought to do something about it'. Thus, no version of socialisation theory can work with Durkheim's 'indeterminate material'; human beings have to be determinate in this one way at least, that of acknowledging themselves to be the same beings over time. In other words, Zuni society relies upon a *sense of self,* even though *concepts of the self,* within Zuni culture, are unlike ours.[5]

This sense of selfhood is necessarily reflexive. If Antigone did not know that she herself were both King Kreon's niece and also Polynices' sister, then she would have no dilemma about whether to obey the royal prohibition on burial of traitors, or to comply with the family duty to bury her brother. However, in this context, Antigone makes a moral decision. It cannot be a socially scripted one because she lacks normative guidelines; her dilemma arises precisely from the fact that those two sets of social norms clash. Nevertheless, she acts, and to understand how and why, we have to know who she is. The rest of the paper concentrates on this very issue; on how we become particular people (possessors of strict personal identity), but people whose personality is not divorced from their sociality, without which we would not be recognisably human. However, this sociality must not be allowed to re-swamp us, or we collapse back into Society's Being. Therefore, I will proceed in two stages, differentiating between:

1 our personal identities, which arise from our citizenship of the whole world; and
2 our social identities, which are made under social conditions that are not of our choosing.

The emergence of personal identity

Fundamentally, *personal identity* is a matter of what we care about in the world. Constituted as we are, and the world being the way it is, humans ineluctably interact with three different orders of reality: the natural, the practical and the social. Humans necessarily have to sustain organic relationships, work relationships and social relationships–if they are to survive and thrive. Therefore, we cannot afford to be indifferent about the concerns that are embedded in each of these three orders. Our emotions convey the imports of these different orders to us. A distinct type of concern derives from each of these three orders: 'physical well-being' in the natural order; 'performative skill' in the practical order; and

'self-worth' in the social order. Emotions are seen as our reflexive responses to all three, because they are 'commentaries on our concerns'.

However, a dilemma now confronts all people. It arises because every person receives all three kinds of emotional commentaries on their concerns, originating from each of these orders of reality–natural, practical and social. Because they have to live and attempt to thrive in these three orders simultaneously, they must necessarily, in some way and to some degree, attend to all three clusters of commentaries. This is their problem. Nothing guarantees that the three sets of first-order emotions dovetail harmoniously, and therefore it follows that the concerns to which they relate cannot all be promoted without conflict arising between them. For example, evasion in response to the prompting of physical fear can threaten social self-worth by producing cowardly acts; cessation of an activity in response to boredom in the practical domain can threaten physical well-being; and withdrawal as a response to social shaming may entail a loss of livelihood. In other words, momentary attention to pressing commentaries might literally produce instant gratification of concerns in one order, but it is a recipe for disaster since we have no alternative but to inhabit these three orders simultaneously, and none of their concerns can be bracketed away for long. It is only on rather rare occasions that a particular commentary has semi-automatic priority, as in the act of escaping a fire, undertaking a test or getting married.

Instead, each person has to work out their own *modus vivendi* in relation to these three orders. What this entails is striking a liveable balance within our trinity of inescapable concerns. This *modus vivendi* can prioritise one of these three orders of reality, as in the case of someone who is said to 'live for their art', but what it cannot do is to neglect entirely the other orders. Yet which precise balance we strike between our concerns, and what precisely figures among an individual's concerns, are what gives us our strict identity as *particular persons*. Eventually, our emergent *personal identities* are a matter of how we prioritise one concern as our 'ultimate concern', and how we subordinate but yet accommodate others to it; for, constituted as we are, we cannot be unconcerned about how we fare in all three orders of reality. Because our concerns can never be exclusively social, and since the *modus vivendi* is worked out by an active and reflective agent, *personal identity* cannot be the gift of society.

The challenge of constructing a *modus vivendi* out of our many commitments is an active process of reflection, which takes place through an 'inner conversation'. In it we 'test' our potential or ongoing commitments against our emotional commentaries, which tell us whether we are up to living this or that committed life. Since the commentaries will not be unanimous, the inner conversation involves evaluating them, promoting some and subordinating others, so that the ultimate concerns we eventually affirm are also those with which we feel we can live. Since the process is fallible (we may get it wrong or circumstances may change), so the conversation is ongoing. I believe that our 'interior conversations' are the most utterly neglected phenomenon in social theory, which has never examined the *process* of reflection that makes us the particular active subjects that we are. This I have begun to unpack as an interior dialogue between the acting 'I', a

process of forging *personal identity* by coming to identify the self as the being-with-this-constellation-of-concerns.[6]

As a result of this act of identity formation, a new source of imports comes into being. We now interpret and articulate imports in the light of our commitments that define us, and this brings with it a transformation of emotional commentary. In short, our new commitments represent a new sounding board for the emotions. For example, if marriage is one of our prime concerns, then an attractive opportunity for infidelity is now also felt as a threat of betrayal; its import is that of a *liaison dangereuse,* because we are no longer capable of the simplicity of a purely first-order response. Our reactions to relevant events are emotionally transmuted by our ultimate concerns. This is reinforced because our commitments also *transvalue our pasts*: the vegetarian is disgusted at once having enjoyed a rare steak, and the 'green' inwardly shudders at once having worn a fur coat. This provides positive reinforcement for present commitments. But the same process also works prospectively, because our lives become organised around our ultimate concerns. We consort and concelebrate with those sharing our commitments. 'Discomfort' is the transvalued feeling that keeps us apart from those with counter-commitments. For instance, feminists report unease in predominantly male gatherings, which struggle for political correctitude.

The resulting *modus vivendi,* which depends upon durable and effective transvaluation, is an achievement. For children and young people, who undoubtedly have inner dialogues, the establishment of a stable configuration of commitments is a virtual impossibility, because they are still learning about themselves, the world and the relations between them. Nor is its achievement a maturational certainty. Some remain at the mercy of their first-order pushes and pulls, drifting from job to job, place to place and relationship to relationship. Drift means an absence of *personal identity* and the accumulation of circumstances that make it harder to form one. The downward spiral of homelessness or addiction is downwards precisely because it condemns people to a preoccupation with the satisfaction of first-order commentaries–the next night or the next fix. Furthermore, destabilised commitments are the result of changes in one's circumstances, some of which are predictable (for example, changes in the life cycle), while others occur because of the contingencies of life in an open system (for instance, involuntary redundancy). These are nodal points that prompt a radical re-opening of the 'internal conversation', but for all people the dialogue is a continuous reflexive monitoring of our concerns, for our commitments are promissory and provisional: subject to renewal or revision.

This exploration of our reflexivity has focused upon our voluntarism, because every version of the 'oversocialised' view (Society's Being), or the preprogrammed view (Modernity's Man), traduces our personal powers to live meaningful lives; they dismiss the power of *personal identity* in shaping our lives around what we care about most and commit ourselves to. Nevertheless, we do not make our personal identities under the circumstances of our choosing. Specifically, when we come to the next stage, that of examining the emergence of our *social identities,* we have to deal with our involuntary placement as *social*

agents and how this affects the *social actors* which some of us can voluntarily become.

The emergence of social identity

Social identity is the capacity to express what we care about in the context of appropriate social roles. The emergence of our 'social selves' is something that occurs at the interface of structure and agency. It is therefore necessarily relational, and for it to be properly so, independent powers have to be granted to both structures and agents. This is what is distinctive about the social realist approach. It grants the existence of people's emergent properties (PEPs) and also the reality of structural and cultural emergent properties (SEPs and CEPs), and sees the emergence of agents and actors as relational developments occurring between them. Conversely, Society's Being presents agency as an epiphenomenon of structure, while Modernity's Man regards structure as an epiphenomenon of agency.

Now, seemingly we have a dilemma. If *social identity* comes from adopting a role and personifying it in a singular manner, rather than simply energising it, then it seems as though we have to call upon *personal identity* to account for precisely who does the active personification. Yet it also appears that we cannot make such an appeal, for it looks, on this account, as though *personal identity* cannot be attained before *social identity* is achieved. How otherwise can people evaluate their social concerns against other kinds of concerns, when ordering their ultimate concerns? This is the dilemma.

The only way out of it is to accept the existence of a dialectical relationship between *personal* and *social identity* (PI and SI, respectively). Yet if this is to be more than fudging then it is necessary to venture three 'moments' of the interplay (PI→SI) that culminate in a synthesis whereby both personal and social identities are emergent and distinct, although they contributed to one another's emergence and distinctiveness.

The first moment is held to be one in which nascent *personal identity holds sway over nascent social identity* (PI←SI). Confronted with a choice–let us say the first decision to be made about one's occupational future–what resources does he or she have to draw upon? The answer has to be experience of the three orders of reality, natural, practical and social, even though as minors they are able to attempt only 'dry runs' at the internal conversation about them. Firstly, their experience of the natural realm is not negligible. Through play, sport, travel and outdoor activities, it is at least extensive enough to perform a regulatory function in the process of deciding on an occupation. My older son, a frustrated explorer, calls it 'life in a fleece'; the younger one, who hated riding, will never be found applying for stable management. Secondly, and similarly, constant interaction in the practical order has supplied positive and negative feedback about the kinds of performative skills from which satisfaction is derived, through exposure to a host of common activities such as painting, drawing, music, construction, sewing, mechanics, gardening, computing, religious practice, childcare, cooking and household

maintenance. Thirdly, in their involuntary social roles, children are reflexive beings, and it is they who determine which of the arenas that they have experienced might become the locus of their own self-worth. The child, and especially the teenager, basically asks: 'Do I want to be like that?' In other words, they inspect not only their own involuntary roles but also the lifestyles of those who have put them there. These are sifted into elements worthy of replication versus others meriting rejection. 'I like studying x, but I don't want to teach' is a frequent verdict of many undergraduates.

The key point here is that there would be no process at all unless the nascent *personal identity* brought something to the task of role selection. Otherwise we would be dealing with an entirely passive procedure of role assignment through socialisation, and be back to Society's Being.

Of course, their preliminary choices are fallible because the crucial missing piece of information is the experience of having made the (occupational) choice itself. Yet, without taking the plunge, there is no other way in which it can be acquired. But in its acquisition the individual herself undergoes change. This is why it is legitimate to disengage a *second 'moment', where the nascent social identity impacts upon the nascent personal identity* (SI←PI). All 'first choices' are experiments, guided by the nascent personal identity, but at this point the 'terms and conditions' of investing oneself in the role, and of choosing to identify with it, also become manifest. What appointees have to ask (internally) is whether they wish to invest themselves in this occupation for the future. Reflexively, their answer can be 'no' to endorsing this particular social identity, in which case their choice is corrigible; they can search for an alternative source for their social identity. However, in the process of experimentation, they will have undergone certain subjective and objective changes. Subjectively, they have acquired some new self-knowledge, which will impact upon their personal identity: they are now people who *know* that they are bored by x, disillusioned by y and uneasy with z. Yet they have also changed objectively, because the opportunity costs have altered for their revised 'second choice' and corrected positions may be harder to come by (for example, the greater struggle experienced by mature students when compared with 'ordinary' undergraduates).

Once subjects have found a satisfying social role, whether on the first or subsequent corrected attempts, they have a decision to make, namely: 'How much of myself am I prepared to invest in it?' *This is the moment of synthesis between personal and social identity, which takes the (PI→SI) form*. Those who have experienced enough of a role to wish to make some of its associated interests their own have also changed, to the degree that they now *know* that they do indeed find such activities to be worthwhile. Quite literally they have lost their disinterested stance, because they now see their self-worth as being constituted by occupying this role. However, most roles are greedy consumers: there are never enough hours in the day to be the 'good' academic, billing lawyer or company executive, and a 'good' parent can be on the go around the clock. Does this mean that this crystallising social identity swamps personal identity?

This cannot be the case for three reasons. Firstly, most of us hold several social roles simultaneously. Now, if all of them are 'greedy', then who or what moderates between their demands? Were we to leave this as a matter that is simply arbitrated by the strength of these competing role demands then we would have reconciled ourselves again to the passive subject. Secondly, if it is assumed that subjects themselves conduct the arbitration then we have to ask who exactly is doing it? The answer can only be a person. However, if it is indeed the person who has these powers then we have to grant that they have the capacity to 'weigh' one role against another, and also to evaluate their social concerns against their other commitments. As was argued above, this is precisely what the 'adult' internal conversation is about. Thirdly, in determining *how much* of themselves anyone will put into their social concerns, they are deciding simultaneously *what* they will put in. So, we need a person to do the active personifying. Thus, *our social identity becomes defined, but necessarily as a subset of personal identity*. The result is a personal identity *within which* the social identity has been assigned its place in the life of an individual. That place may be large ('she lives for her work') or small ('he's only in it for the money').

Unless we acknowledge this, we will go far astray by making assumptions that the same constraints and enablements have a standardised impact upon all agents who are similarly placed. Instead, in every social situation, objective factors, such as vested interests and opportunity costs for different courses of action, are filtered through agents' subjective and reflexive determinations. Actions are not mechanically determined, nor are they the subject of a uniform cost-benefit analysis that works in terms of a single currency of 'utiles'. Rather, it is the agent who brings her own 'weights and measures' to bear, which are defined by the nature of her 'ultimate concerns'.

What difference does realism's concept of the agent make?

The aim of this analysis has been to secure a concept of the agent who is active and reflexive; to conceptualise people who have the properties and powers to monitor their own lives, to mediate structural and cultural properties of society, and thus to contribute to societal reproduction or transformation. However, the process of being human is ongoing, because throughout life we continue our reflexive work. The internal conversation is never suspended, it rarely sleeps, and what it is doing throughout the endless contingent circumstances it encounters is continuously monitoring its concerns. Inwardly, the subject is living a rich, unseen moral life that is evaluative (rather than calculative, as is the case for Modernity's Man) and which is meditative (rather than appropriative, as is the lot of Society's Being). What these subjects are doing is conducting a continuous assessment of whether what they once devoted themselves to, as their ultimate concern(s), are still worthy of this devotion. Equally, they are assessing whether the price that was once paid for subordinating and accommodating other concerns is still one with which they can live.

What difference does this conception of the active agent make to social theory? In a nutshell, this moral individual has powers of ongoing reflexive monitoring of both self and society. These are far outside the register of Modernity's Man, who remains shackled to his own individualistic preference schedule. In parallel, this subject is also capable of authentic *creativity,* which can transform 'society's conversation' in a radical way that is foreign to Society's Being, who is condemned to expressing mere conventional permutations on society's conversation.

In turn, regarding the 'internal conversation' as central to the problem of agency has technical implications for explanation. These arise from the fact that attaching such importance to the inner dialogue means upholding a modified view of first-person epistemic privilege. This does not entail endorsement of any of those excessive historical claims made about self-knowledge: that it is omniscient (Hume), infallible (Descartes), indubitable (Hamilton) or incorrigible (Ayer). Instead, what is presumed is only that difference in privileged access which leads to the basic asymmetry between first-person and third-person accounts of mental states. When speaking myself, in private as in public, the presumption that I know what I mean necessarily gives me, but not you, knowledge of what I believe I expressed in my thought or utterance. In speaking to herself, the agent's deliberations are made up of sayings that she holds to be true of herself; and speakers themselves cannot wonder whether they generally mean what they say, whilst hearers or hypothetical eavesdroppers are liable to considerable interpretative errors.[7] It is freely admitted that an agent may be wrong *in* her beliefs concerning herself, but not *about* them. What she does with self-warrant is to question and answer herself about her mental states and their mutual relationships, knowing what she means as she tells herself about them.[8] In so doing, she does what no one else can. This is sufficient to leave her with privileged authority in her own life. In basing her private and public conduct upon her reflexive deliberations, she draws on meanings known *directly* to her, which can only be known *indirectly* by others, through fallible interpretations.

What this serves to reinforce is the fundamental nature of the 'problem of agency'. It would cease to be either fundamental or problematic if third parties were able to read the agents' minds as well as the agents do themselves. Facts about agents' mental doings would then become just further psychological data to be integrated with other societal data into an explanatory framework. This, of course, was the fallacy of 'downwards conflation' and its presumption that the forces of socialisation simply imprint themselves upon agency (norms, values, attitudes, and so on). As beliefs, conceived of as 'indeterminate material'. It fallaciously advanced a third-person sociology precisely because it denied properties and powers to agents–properties and powers which underpin their first-person authority. Consequently, there was a denial of personal emergent properties (PEPs) and a precipitous slide into determinism.

Conversely, whenever there is acceptance of first-person authority and of its basic asymmetry with third-person accounts then the problem of agency can never be bypassed. Those who accept this will not be found advancing 'hydraulic'

accounts about the effects of social factors on people, classes, groups or collectivities. However, the danger is often that this results in an intransigent individualism concerning our dispositional states (desires, beliefs, attitudes and evaluations). For consistency, advocacy of such personal uniqueness should defy any form of generalisation, and therefore would constitute an impasse as far as sociological explanation is concerned. The usual way in which methodological individualists and those from the hermeneutic tradition have sought to evade this dead end for sociology is by postulating 'typical individuals' (their beliefs, desires, and so on) acting in 'typical contexts'. To posit such typicality presumes aggregation, which is the only way that the methodological individualist considers it legitimate to move from the micro- to the macro- level, that is, the typical strategy of the 'upward conflationist'. But such a move is basically incoherent, because the process of generalisation completely substitutes third-person interpretations for first-person authoritative accounts, and usually ends up by endorsing some form of agential essentialism. For example, this methodological aggregation would reduce capitalism to typical capitalists confronting typical situations with the typical optimising strategy of *Homo economicus*. Capitalism is therefore presented as the simple outworking of the inherent greed of individual entrepreneurs. This interpretation misrepresents both structure, by denying the relations of natural necessity, which are constitutive of capitalism (by presenting it as an aggregate of discrete situations confronted by discrete agents), and agency, by essentialising personal greed as the dispositional drive that accounts for this social form.

What is distinctive about social realism, but needs to be developed further, is that the reflexive deliberations of agents do indeed have their 'intrinsic' effects (that is, they modify the lives of subjects), but also their 'extrinsic' effects (that is, they mediate societal properties (SEPs and CEPs)). We make our lives, at least in part, by deliberating *upon* the structural and cultural contexts in which we find ourselves involuntarily. Unlike 'central conflationists', who amalgamate structural properties and agential properties into an undifferentiated amalgam of 'practices' (see, for example, Giddens 1993, 1995, 1997), realism upholds the subject/object distinction. It does so in order to explore the interplay between them, and thus to determine who is responsible for morphogenesis/morphostasis—where, when and how. Analysis of the stringency of constraints and of the degrees of freedom, differentially pertaining to different groups of agents, will go a long way towards explaining the 'who', the 'when' and the 'where' of social transformation versus reproduction. But to capture the 'what' and the 'how' we have to introduce agential deliberations which, however public they become, have necessarily made their detour through the reflexivity of every agent's 'internal conversation'.

It is the 'projects' that we subjectively design which determine whether we activate the *powers* of structural or cultural properties—or leave them unexercised. It is our deliberations that determine what we will make of the constraints and enablements which we confront, what opportunity costs we are prepared to pay, and whether we consider it worthwhile to join others in the organised pursuit of change or the

defence of the status quo. Agential subjectivity thus mediates socio-cultural objectivity. But this must never be regarded as a standardised procedure, such as information processing or the development of a generalised 'habitus', for two reasons. Firstly, it is evaluative through and through, and the key to variability in valuations is supplied by personal identity and its subset, social identity. Secondly, the significance of insisting that agents' knowledge of their own mental states is neither omniscient, infallible, indubitable nor incorrigible is that there can indeed be social factors that affect our outlooks (by narrowing or broadening our horizons, inducing resignation or fuelling ambition) without the agent correctly diagnosing them or even having any degree of discursive penetration of them. However, precisely in order to establish this convincingly one urgently needs to know what is (and, equally importantly, is not) going on in the internal dialogue.[9] One way or another, we will be unable either to account for or comprehend the processes by which agents reproduce or transform structures unless we examine their internal conversations.

The private life of the social subject holds the key to the 'problem of agency'. This key fits into the structural lock, represented by socio-cultural constraints and enablements. Together they open the door through which we can proceed to resolve the bigger 'problem of structure and agency'.[10]

Notes

1 This paper was written while holding an ESRC research fellowship.
2 I have dealt with the 'higher-level' properties and powers that differentiate Primary Agents from Corporate Agents, or 'agents' from 'actors', in Archer (1995), Chapter 8; consequently, they will not be re-examined here.
3 'Man' was the term current in Enlightenment thinking. I reluctantly abide by it, as standing for humanity, when referring to this tradition, its heirs, successors and adversaries.
4 Locke put forward a definition which has considerable intuitive appeal, such that a person was 'a thinking intelligent being, that has reason and reflection, and can consider itself as itself, the same thinking thing in different times and places' (Locke: 1690, II, xxvii, 2). From Bishop Butler onwards, critics have construed such continuity of consciousness exclusively in terms of memory and then shown that memory alone fails to secure strict personal identity. See, for example, Bernard Williams (1973). A defence of a modified neo-Lockean definition is provided by David Wiggins (1976), which preserves the original insight.
5 For an empirical account of how our *sense of self* emerges from our practical relations with reality, see Archer (2000), Chapter 4.
6 See Archer (2000), Chapter 7.
7 On this issue see Davidson (1984).
8 On this issue see Alston (1971).
9 The problem of 'generalisation' confronted by methodological individualists, as mentioned above, does not confront social realism because the stratified model of agency which deals with selves, primary agents, corporate agents and actors does not reduce all forms of agency to the personal or individual level.
10 See my *Human Reflexivity: Mediating between structure and agency, Cambridge University Press 2003.*

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2 Are critical realist ethics foundationalist?

Nick Hostettler and Alan Norrie

This chapter began life as an extended review of Roy Bhaskar's recent book, *From East to West* (hereafter *FETW;* 2000). It has since become a more general analysis of the ethics he has argued for in his developing account of the relationship between realism and moral theory. Our instinctive reaction to *FETW* was that it did not reflect what we took to be the central strengths of his earlier work on dialectical critical realism, in *Dialectic: The Pulse of Freedom* (1993; referred to hereafter as *Dialectic*) and *Plato Etc.* (1994). On the contrary, we saw *FETW* as renouncing some of those strengths. This, however, left us with a question: did *FETW* simply represent a break with the earlier work, or did it continue themes already present there that we had previously overlooked? On reflection, we decided that the latter was the case, and therefore to investigate how these themes had emerged and come to play a part in the Bhaskar œuvre. Eventually, this investigation took us to themes in his earlier pre-, or perhaps proto-, dialectical work, *Scientific Realism and Human Emancipation* (*SRHE;* 1986). This chapter is an account of this process of exploration.

Our initial analysis of *FETW* was that Bhaskar had produced an antinomial or split form of ethics, inconsistent with the argument of *Dialectic,* in the name of a new 'transcendental' dialectical critical realism. The first part of this chapter renders this analysis in terms of four major antinomies that we found in *FETW*. To investigate the roots of these antinomies, we followed a clue given by Andrew Collier, which concerned Bhaskar's relationship to the work of Jurgen Habermas. We discovered there an ambiguous relationship to Habermas's neo-Kantian discourse ethics—one might say an antinomial attitude. We compared their different views on the foundations of ethical thinking, and this led us to see a further antinomy in Bhaskar's thought, on the question of whether ethics possesses an ontological foundation in universal aspects of human being. The second part of this chapter investigates the Habermas-Bhaskar nexus and the related question of ethical foundations.

Thus our primary focus is on what we see as the progressive development of antinomies within Bhaskar's work and we argue that they are at their most pronounced in *FETW*. We see the development of Bhaskar's work in terms of a *dialectic of realist and irrealist dialectics.* Realism comes to the fore in his critiques of irrealism and ontological monovalence, especially in the dialectical critical realism of *Dialectic,* while his ethics, going back to *SRHE,* are the primary (if ambivalent)

locus of irrealism. The two dialectics meet in his philosophical anthropology where the realist dialectic is ultimately overwhelmed by the irrealist: this is the effect of *FETW*. While Bhaskar's attempt to develop a realist morality is unsuccessful, we remain committed to the realist philosophical project developed in *Dialectic*. The aim of this chapter is accordingly a defence of what we take to be the basic orientation of dialectical critical realism. In terms of ethical orientation, we believe that this leads to an anti-foundationalist position. We think this can be linked to the idea of the 'concrete universal' in *Dialectic*. We are not able to develop this thought here, though we briefly sketch it in the conclusion. Our primary aim is to identify the conflicting ethical pathways we see in Bhaskar's work, so our method is essentially one of immanent critique.

Odyssey of a (beautiful) soul

Understanding From East To West

From East To West[1] is the latest stage in a philosophical journey that has witnessed Bhaskar move from his early work on transcendental realism and critical naturalism to his accounts of explanatory critique and dialectics. The first two terms later became merged under the rubric of critical realism, and the dialectical radicalisation of the system led to an overall theory of dialectical critical realism (DCR). *FETW* is a further development of DCR in a transcendental direction, signified as transcendental dialectical critical realism (TDCR).

Of this latest development Bhaskar writes that '[n]othing in this book involves the rejection of any existing (dialectical) critical realist position' (2000: ix). Indeed, he writes that one view may be that TDCR is 'a development within DCR' (2000:9), accentuating questions of totality and ethical agency (at 3L and 4D in DCR terminology). However, *FETW* can also be seen as a 'development beyond [DCR] (which however presupposes it) to a transcendental or TDCR' (2000:9). Given the novelty of the argument in *FETW,* there seems to be good reason for seeing it as a separate and further development of Bhaskar's earlier work. Doing so helps us to investigate and to problematise the links between this new Eastern turn to his thought and his previous arguments, as well as to see these arguments in their own right. It is important to do this, we will argue, because there appear to be significant differences in approach between DCR and TDCR, notwithstanding Bhaskar's own assertions to the contrary.[2]

We focus here on what we see as the central task of *FETW*. This is to resolve the tensions and contradictions that exist between two dialectics articulated as two modes of philosophical anthropology: a *science of concrete social being* (developed in the first two chapters of *Dialectic,* within the parameters of the 1M to 4D schema, as four-planar being and the stratified conception of the self) and a *theory of the good based on an ideal state of social being* (developed in *Dialectic* as *eudaimonia* and especially continued in *FETW*). *FETW* is motivated by an unacknowledged tension between the realist dialectics of the real and possible, and an irrealist dialectics of the real and the ideal, with the latter threatening to

subsume the former. This is the dialectic of realist and irrealist dialectics mentioned in the introduction, which *FETW* sees itself as sublating, but we see it as containing and repressing. *FETW* is best understood as an attempt to stabilise the relationship between these antagonistic dialectics by integrating them into a single, totalised position. While *FETW* is ostensibly an attempt to establish a realist theory of the good, its development is limited by a novel form of idealism. Where Hegel's dogmatic assertion was that the real was necessarily ideal, Bhaskar's is that the ideal is necessarily real or really possible. It might be said that 'Hegel is turned on his head' were it not that both positions remain in thrall to idealism.

Two dialectics in the Bhaskar œuvre

The 'essential thesis' in the Preface to *FETW* is that

> Man is essentially God (and therefore also essentially one, but also essentially unique); and that, as such, he is essentially free and already en-lightened, a freedom and enlightenment which is overlain by extraneous, heteronomous determinations which both (a) occlude and (b) qualify this essential fact.
>
> (2000:ix)

The response to this essential but occluded freedom in man through God is that such freedom should be reclaimed and realised insofar as

> Man has to shed both the illusion that he is not essentially Godlike and free and the constraining heteronomous determinations (constituting an objective world of illusion, duality and alienation) which that illusion grounds.
>
> *(ibid.)*

Bhaskar arrives at this argument via a route that takes in both 'radical libertarian Western thought and mystical Eastern thought' *(ibid.)*. His argument draws on a number of Eastern concepts which he sees as either possessing Western equivalents or as enhancing a Western ethical vocabulary. Thus concepts of *avidya* (ignorance) and *maya* (illusion) are grafted onto Bhaskar's previous DCR language of systematic irrealist categorial error. This is then linked to the diagnosis of self-alienation and alienation from God, signified in concepts such as *karma* (presence of the past blocking development), *dharma* (objectively moral action), *moksha* (liberation) and *yagya* (letting go). The following passage summarises and indicates the form of his argument:

> The fundamental malaise then is self-alienation, and this underpins a chain of *avidya-maya* dualism, multiple and heteronomous orders of determination and degrees of constraint […] –alienation–reification–conditionality–attachment–ontological insecurity–fear (stemming from self-alienation)–tina formation–denegation–reflexive inconsistency […] Heteronomy is always

> manifest in attachment, set by *karma* and grounded in self-alienation, based on practical ignorance or *avidya* (especially of our true selves). These form a vicious interlocking circle. To break free from it is to become what we most truly are; this is our birthright and our task, our bounden duty and our joy: liberation.
>
> (2000:51)

Is this linking of Eastern concepts in TDCR to the pre-existing DCR approach consistent with the themes of the latter, as Bhaskar claims, or is something different going on? This is a difficult question to answer. On the one hand, there seems to be something fundamentally at odds with the original conception of ontological realism as outlined in DCR. At the core of *FETW* is a contrast between essence and appearance, in which the essence of man–what he already is–is both expressive and foundational. DCR's critique of ontological monovalence, by contrast, sets itself against all essentialisms, expressivisms and foundationalisms so that it is a fundamental criticism of Hegel *inter alia* that his work is 'Geist-eidetically-centrist […] expressivist-holist' (1993:91). *FETW* is *in principle* anti-expressivist (2000:11), but not in practice: '[t]o reclaim and re-enchant reality we have only to become what we really, essentially, truly, are and will never cease to be' (2000:5).

On the other hand, there does appear to be some continuity with the ethics of *Dialectic,* which contains the following conclusion:

> Alethic truth, as optimally grounding reason, can be the rational cause of transformative negating agency in absenting constraints on self-emancipation, that is, on the liberation of our causal powers to flourish. For to exist is to be able to become, which is to possess the capacity for self-development, a capacity that can be fully realised only in a society founded on the principle of universal concretely singularised human autonomy in nature. This process is dialectic; and it is the pulse of freedom.
>
> (2000:385)

This formulation seems to be consistent with the arguments of *FETW,* not least in terms of the problems it raises. These arise because of a clash between two ideas. One concerns the importance of process, history and change, which informs the dialectic of *Dialectic,* the other the definition of an ideal social condition. This is a tension between a dialectic of historical possibility and a dialectic of ideal emergence. This tension is captured in different senses of the meaning of freedom: in the first dialectic it refers to historically conditioned capacities to enter into and transform historical processes; in the second, it refers to a transhistorical capacity of the species to realise the ideal state of social being. The tension between the two dialectics emerges because there is no way of ruling out the possibility that they might diverge, that the structure of historical possibility might foreclose the possibility of realising the ideal, or may not even offer it. Overcoming this problem

generates the need to make the ideal society a transhistorically necessary possibility.[3]

FETW is an attempt to do this 'at one blow'. It announces its solution with the following wake-up call:

> man is essentially God, already essentially free, even now already enlightened; an enlightenment, freedom and Godliness that has only (!) to be experientially accessed, stabilised in his consciousness and so realised in practice.
>
> (2000:41)

The exclamation mark hardly modifies the argument, which is, in effect, a form of socio-historical bypass operation. The conception that we are essentially godlike has two tasks to perform: firstly, it is meant to sustain the identity of the possible and the ideal by ruling out the possibility that the ideal is unrealisable; and, secondly, it is also meant to secure the notion that the real is constituted by the ideal. Operating between a realist dialectic of the real and the possible and an irrealist dialectic of the ideal and the real, *FETW* shifts the balance firmly in favour of the latter. It is, however, the foreclosure rather than the resolution of a philosophical problem, as we shall see.

Areas of discontinuity, forms of antinomy

The shift just referred to may be seen first of all in the observation that what lies behind *FETW* is not only a turn to Eastern philosophy but also a more favourable reading of Hegel. *Dialectic* advertised itself as 'a non-preservative sublation of Hegelian dialectic' (1993:xiii). *FETW* finds, however, a 'rational kernel' (dialectic as developmental learning process) as well as a 'golden nugget' (dialectics of co-presence) and a 'platinum plate' (diagnostic value of dialectic) within the 'mystical shell' of Hegel's ontological monovalence. Yet, if the critique of *Dialectic* is to be followed then these positive aspects of Hegel are swallowed up by his monovalence. Irrealism meant that the 'learning process' only went back into positivity so that there was no real development, while dialectics were always reconciled and lost their diagnostic value. By contrast, *FETW's* discussion of Hegel focuses on dialectic as a learning process, and literally only *mentions* the critique of ontological monovalence before pursuing a discussion of the subject, identity and totality that is quite consistent with the idea of dialectic as learning process. The sting of the DCR critique is drawn, leaving us in the realm of spirit and the Idea, apprehended as the journey of the reincarnating soul to itself and God.

If we are right to claim that there has been shift in the balance between the two dialectics that occurs between the work which establishes DCR and *FETW* then one would expect to find a process of unsynthesised and supplementary innovation in the latter. We are going to suggest that this is indeed the case in four central areas: Bhaskar's discussion of categorial realism, ultimata, creation *ex nihil,* and the self.

Categorial realism

With regard to categorial realism, the reality of categories in the world, independent of our knowledge of them, has always been fundamental to Bhaskar. Thus in *FETW* the starting point is that '[c]ausality, absence, space, time, emergence and so on are all real features of being' and this is 'the only position consistent with a transcendental realism' (2000:34). We will have cause to return to the idea of a 'transcendental realism', but let us see where Bhaskar takes this starting point in his discussion of the social world in *FETW*.

Agents' accounts of the categorisation (the fundamental constitutive structure) of the social reality they inhabit may be (a) false insofar as they are inadequate, distortive or occlusive. At the same time, however, they may be (b) an 'objectively constituted (that is, independently of the subjects' perception of it) and causally efficacious part of social reality, lived as a conceptual moment in its reproduction or transformation' (2000:35). An example of this kind of analysis would be Marx's account of the wage form (2000:36), but Bhaskar makes a third point about categorial realism: that this second level is (c) nonetheless 'dependent for its existence and power […] on the true categorial structure it misdescribes and obscures'. What this means becomes clearer later, but it is worth noting, as Bhaskar says, that this 'gives us at least two levels of categorisation of being' *(ibid.)*. So what are they?

As we have said, (a) and (b) are exemplified by Marx's analysis of the wage form, that is, they are points relevant to an ideology critique. What is typically missing from both 'is an underlying […] level of structure […] or level of reality; and it is in terms of the omission […] of the structure that the false […] consciousness is explained' (2000:36). Point (c) is rather different. It is a 'third mode of objectively constituted false but dependent being', but it does not draw upon the false constitution of reality as revealed by a social scientific method, but upon *an analysis of the metaphysical concept of truth,* which yields three forms of untruth. There may be falsity *about* an object or being (see (a) above), falsity *in* an object or being (see (b) above), but there may also be falsity *of* an object or being to its essential nature or intrinsic self. The last relates to (c) above. This is falsity, insofar as it relates to human beings, *'in virtue of being contrary to the true nature of human beings'* (2000:37).

Thus, we do indeed have two categorisations of being, and in their wake *two kinds of categorial realism.* One is the kind of realism that looks for existing, real categories in the natural or social world. The other is a realism about the truth of a real category, that is, 'its alethic ground or fundamental categorial structure' (2000:37). In short, categorial realism refers to real categories, but also to *ideal* real categories.

That there should be two forms of realism should not surprise us if we recall that TDCR contains not one but two distinct forms of transcendental argument. Remember that critical realism itself contained a transcendental element before there was either dialectics or transcendental dialectics: the name for Bhaskar's initial system was 'transcendental realism'. The two very different modes are reflected, but not explicated, in the following:

> It is precisely the categorial or most *fundamental constitutive* structures of reality (those without which other structures of the world could not exist) that transcendental realism (as further developed by (transcendental) dialectical critical realism) begins to delineate.
>
> (2000:34; emphasis added)

There are indeed two kinds of transcendence going on here, and they seem to be fundamentally different from each other. One refers, in contradistinction to transcendental idealism, to a structural or relational truth to be found in material causes; the other, in alignment with transcendental idealism, to the essential ethical truth that lies within being. *FETW* elides this fundamental difference between two kinds of realism, two kinds of transcendence.

The elision of the two modes of transcendence is Bhaskar's key innovation in *FETW*. Categorial realism has come to mean that the ideal state of a form of being is *fundamentally constitutive* of all its possible states. This new conception of categorial realism seeks to irrevocably conjoin the categorial structure of the ideal state of a form of being to its philosophical ontology, that is, to the categorial framework needed to conceptualise that form of being at the highest level of generality.

In *Dialectic,* the philosophical ontology of social being encompassed four-planar being and the stratified self, while the ideal state was presented as the eudaimonistic society. The unspoken tension in *Dialectic* emerges at this point. The philosophical ontology of social being is universalistic in the sense that its abstract categorial framework *logically* encompasses possibilities of all kinds. These logical possibilities can be thought of as four kinds of absences. Real, historical possibilities can be thought of as real absences in two senses: they may be realised pasts or unrealised possible futures. A third sense of absence refers to unrealised possible states that are no longer realisable, and as such are absented utopias. (It might be argued that the trajectories to communism whose absence was witnessed by Marx fall into this class.) Finally, there is that class of imagined, non-real absences or states of affairs which, while logically consistent with the philosophical ontology, never were nor will be historically realisable: irreal utopias.

The problem that *FETW* confronts is this: the status of the conception of the trajectories to the eudaimonistic society is ambiguous because it seeks to conflate these different kinds of absences. The concept of eudaimonia is intended to represent an ideal possibility conceived within the parameters of the philosophical ontology. It is meant to be a rational conception of a limited case of social development, which should be understood as the 'ultimate objective' or *telos* of social being. As such it is intended to represent a potentially real historical possibility whose threshold might be crossed. A precondition of this is that the ideal is a universally real absence, that social being contains the eternal possibility that a real tendency towards it can be established and sustained. However, the philosophical anthropology of *Dialectic,* its adumbration of four-planar being and the stratified self, did not, and could not, offer this guarantee. We witness then the unresolved clash of two dialectics, of the real and the possible and of the ideal

and the real. This dialectic of dialectics is implicit in *Dialectic,* while *FETW* seeks to resolve it in favour of the second, the dialectic of the ideal and the real, but only at the cost of dispatching the first, along with all its strengths.

Ultimata

Next there is Bhaskar's discussion in *FETW* of 'ultimata', which stems from the idea of dispositional realism. Bhaskar writes that categories are objectively real in the intransitive dimension, so that one can have knowledge, or ignorance, of 'ultimata or deep levels of structure' (2000:2)—but what are ultimata? In which sense of transcendental identified above are they considered to be 'deep levels'? A clear indication is given in the description of God 'as the ultimate categorial structure of the world including our socialised being' (2000:12), which suggests we are speaking about ideal real entities.

Yet Bhaskar alternates between meanings. Ultimata are also characterised by their dispositional identity, and at one level they appear to be just the most fundamental entities required for a depth realist explanation of phenomena. Thus, they 'may be real or merely epistemic (i.e. given our present knowledge, for the moment) for us' (2000:31). Similarly, they may be 'local, regional or total (i.e. complete, whole), enduring or transient, potential or actualised, quiescent (latent, dormant) or active' *(ibid.)*. Yet while one may have local or regional ultimata on this account, 'ultimate levels of being are more or less relatively absolute or relatively independent' *(ibid.),* and one can also have 'non-relatively absolute or completely independent being […] or the absolute simpliciter [which] is God' *(ibid.)*.

There is movement here from the one kind of transcendental argument to the other, but it is a move that is not presaged in earlier work. Thus, in *Dialectic,* ultimata are discussed solely in terms of the causal powers of rhythmic entities as historical phenomena (1993:77, 255). They consist in 'the constellational identity of […] structures, mechanisms and spatio-temporal processes manifesting itself in the rhythmic identity of those changing causal powers with their spatiotemporal exercise' (1993:77). This is a description of 'real' ultimata, not 'ideally real' ones. To make this quite clear, Bhaskar cautions us that he is 'not claiming that our ultimata are the ultimata (or ur-stuff), or that we can know them or that if we did we would be able to explain, less predict, much else' (1993:78). *FETW* lacks this caution, proclaiming that 'God-stuff, the substance of God' is spirit, which is the ultimate nature of man (2000:41).

This shift towards an acceptance of conceptions of 'ur-stuff' in Bhaskar's latest thought is made possible by his conflation of the two modes of transcendence. 'Ultimata' now denotes a conceptual space in which ontological depth, processuality, and the completion of tendencies towards the realisation of ideal, ultimate possibilities meet. The concept of the eudaimonistic society embodies the human ideal and its categorial structure provides the account of the ultimata of social being. Given the new form of categorial realism, the categorial structure of eudaimonia must therefore be seen as that of both the *telos* (in the sense of being an ideal ultimate objective) of social being and the 'essence' or what is

'fundamentally constitutive' of it. Together they form the *logos* of the idealisation of social being.

However, in the absence of a guarantee of the eternally real possibility of the ideal, such ultimata remain precarious speculative constructions. There is a great deal at stake here. In the absence of such a guarantee these essential and teleological ultimata are potentially irreal. Bhaskar uses two complementary tactics to secure such a guarantee: the first is historical creativity; the second is individual self-realisation. If either strategy fails, leaving such ultimata with no realist guarantee, then Bhaskar has enveloped dialectical critical realism in a speculative dialectics of irrealism and produced an involution of the realist project.

Ex nihilo *creation*

Turning to the first strategy, Bhaskar seeks to link the real to the ideal by linking historical creativity with *ex nihilo* creation. This is central to *FETW,* for it is the *differentia specifica* of God's ingredience in man. It is 'implicit in every transformative act, which is always an emergence out of (from) absence, and is paradigmatically and ideally spontaneous, i.e. without mediation' (2000:43). Human creativity *ex nihilo* is 'ingredient in every genuine act' and is 'in mimetic reproduction of and heterocosmic affinity with God's creation of the world' *(ibid.)*. It is also essential to the capacity for transcendence in human being, for the moment of transcendence 'is also the moment of creation ex nihilo, from the gap, pause or silence […] or from the unbounded or vacuum state' (2000:48).

Comparing this with *Dialectic,* we find that *ex nihilo* creation is not accepted in the latter. Bhaskar discusses it there in the context of his criticism of one form of Hegelianism, in which he considers the consequences of positing a 'unique beginning of everything' in terms of 'creation ex nihilo by an act of spontaneous radical autogenesis' (1993:77). Such an approach would involve paradox, self-contradiction and reference to the kinds of ur-stuff ultimata that in *Dialectic* at least he rejected. It may be conceded that the context of this discussion in *Dialectic* (of a form of Hegelianism) makes unclear the ultimate significance of these remarks for Bhaskar's own position. Yet the rejection of *ex nihilo* creation, which is not otherwise discussed in the book, suggests a different attitude to that expressed in *FETW.*

In *FETW,* it is true, transcendence and *ex nihilo* creation are associated with the concept of emergence, which is of course central to the realism of *Dialectic.* However, the relationship between the two is blurred, as the following passages in *FETW,* in which Bhaskar discusses the logic of scientific discovery, indicate:

> Transcendence is essential to scientific discovery and all human activity. Thus in the logic of scientific discovery there is […] a moment of transcendence, when a new […] concept emerges […] Such a concept can be neither induced nor deduced from the existing field of data, but emerges 'out of the blue', from the space between or beyond, from nowhere, *ex nihilo*.
>
> (2000:49)

In what sense, however, is the moment of scientific discovery *ex nihilo*? Bhaskar moves to qualify 'out of the blue':

> Of course the ground for the creative discovery must be prepared. Thus it is typically from a transcendent cause on to an immanent ground, but creativity is essential to all human agency.
>
> *(ibid.)*

Granted, but what is the status of this creativity: is it *ex nihilo,* or does not the existence of transcendent cause and immanent ground locate the new and emergent *within material limits*? Matter may indeed be creative and autopoietic, as Bhaskar said in *Dialectic* (1993:49), but that is *not* the same as saying that it emerges *ex nihilo.* As the passage continues a slide becomes apparent: '[e]very human act is not only a transformation of what pre-existed it but also *de novo,* a novelty, a new beginning. In this sense it mirrors and mimics the creation' (2000:49). There is a highly significant difference between creation *ex nihilo* and creation *de novo.* The latter is consistent with material emergence; the former requires something more. Bhaskar goes on to say that '[e]mergence generally […] has the same logical form as the transcendence involved in human creativity but does not essentially involve consciousness, or at least self-consciousness' (2000:49). If we take the emergence of new historical possibility as the result of depth-totalising social transformation, is Bhaskar saying therefore that the new possibility is *at the same time* transcendent? If so, in what sense? *De novo* or *ex nihilo*? There is a conflation here of material processes and how they work to produce novel emergence and transcendental ur-processes and how they emerge from nothing. This is central to Bhaskar's attempt to formulate a guarantee for the real possibility of the ideal.

By relating human creativity directly to the ultimate (as *ex nihilo* rather than *de novo*), Bhaskar is changing the sense in which he sees the historical development of the social totality as open. The development of the idea of totality in *Dialectic* stressed the absence of closure, providing scope for human agency and intervention in determining historical trajectories. Human agency in an open totality was seen in terms of realising *given* possibilities, as in Elster's 'branching' theory of history. This conception also included new structures of possibility emerging through social activity such that the given structure might be transcended out of its very givenness. The sense in which creativity is linked to totality in *FETW* redirects this sense of the opening up of possibilities, which is now directly related to proclaiming the possibility of realising the ultimate. Human creativity is now conceived as essentially unconstrained in the sense that there cannot be any historical conditions under which establishing a tendency towards realising the ideal would not be possible. Social creativity is defined as transcendent whereby there cannot be any historical obstacles to the realisation of eudaimonia. The social totality is reconceived as open in the new sense that there are now infinite pathways both to and from the threshold of the eudaimonistic society.

Essentially unconstrained creativity, then, is what provides the answer to the fundamental question facing *FETW*. The categorial need for the ideal to be a historically grounded possibility, if the conflation of realism and idealism is to succeed, is asserted. However, the problems of concrete historicity are effectively sidestepped with a definition of human creativity that treats it, *a priori,* in terms of its grounding in the possibility of realising the ultimate. In *FETW,* human creativity is assumed to be just that which is able to realise the ideal (so that the only real 'historical' problem is bringing it about!).

The self

Finally, we come to the self, and Bhaskar's second effort to secure the ideal in the real. Here Bhaskar conjoins two inflections that relate to the idea of the self as both non-fixed and relational. However, whereas the inflection from *Dialectic* points to the social processes that remain a part of the self, the specific inflection of *FETW* is to be found in the form of a mystical relationality between the here and now self and its karmic and reincarnatory forms.

Bhaskar begins to discuss the self by drawing on the realist analysis of *Dialectic*:

> The basic problem with analytical reasoning is that it implies that things are fixed and abstractable from their environment […] The dialectical position sees things as being existentially constituted by their rhythmics or geohistories and by the totality of their relations with other things. This naturally leads into a radical account of the self. What is normally understood by the self is an illicit abstraction from a much deeper and broader (and developing) totality. (2000:62)

This relational conception of the self is indeed a radical one. It points to both its relational centredness and its unfinished nature, but, importantly, argues that its limits and possible future developments depend on a geo-historically developing, open and unfinished totality. *FETW* also introduces, however, a differently inflected self, one that *already is in essence complete*:

> Above all, we must avoid the mistake of thinking of the identity of a thing as being fixed. Things, especially human subjects, are involved in dialectical learning processes; they are essentially in development and in a process of becoming, albeit in the process of becoming *what they already essentially are*. (2000:64; emphasis added)

This, in our view, is a much less radical view of the self than *Dialectic* proposed. It is a self with a big 'S', already complete, subject to the dialectical learning process it must undergo in order to be 'for itself. In the following passage, note the asserted identity of two different kinds of self, and the capitalisation of the 'S' in the second:

> While dispositional realism insists that it is a fundamental mistake to identify or reduce the nature of the self to agency […], it is nevertheless the case […] that action from the standpoint of the Self is dharmic, spontaneously right and most creative, compassionate and coherent.
>
> (2000:62)

The function of the concept of the self in *FETW* may be understood in relation to two issues. The Self emerges at the point at which the transhistorical and reincarnatory soul finally meets a historical self in the eudaimonistic society. In the first place, this conception displaces the *logos* of idealisation from the species as a whole onto the individual. Through reincarnation the individual belongs to a realm of transhistorical being through which it can attain its ideal state of being despite the historical misfortunes of concrete existences in which the ideal is impossible. The *logos* of idealisation is not arbitrarily confined to the level of the species, but is universally applicable to all its members. In the second place, it lends a certain substance to the claim that the ideal is fundamentally constitutive of the real and reinforces the claims about the essentially unconditioned nature of creativity.

Most importantly, however, the concept of the self/Self/soul is an attempt to shift the balance of discussion from real history and possibility to ideal reality and necessity. The concept of the soul–the ideal, godlike part of each individual–is the keystone of an ostensive attempt to generate a transcendental realism that is an idealised realist theory of human nature. Its fundamental moves give rise to an ideal realm which is prior to, constitutive of, works its way through, and achieves its own completion by means of the real. Might there be, *mutatis mutandis,* a more Hegelian conception? All that Bhaskar has done is to give the Hegelian subject an Eastern complexion. Once again, the dialectic of the two dialectics, of the real and the irreal, is cast in favour of the second, the irreal.

Recreating the beautiful soul

Bhaskar sets out in *FETW* to further sublate idealist insights within dialectical critical realism. He seeks to synthesise critical realism and idealist transcendentalism in the concept of 'absolute categorial structure' in an attempt to secure both real knowledge of the ideal and the real possibility of its realisation. His innovation here might be described as the invention of the ubiquitous necessity of the real possibility of the ideal. Unfortunately, in trying to secure this concept through a reconceptualisation of human nature, Bhaskar introduces elements which both dehistoricise and desocialise social being. In the end, the fundamental movement in *FETW* is not so much towards the East, but back to earlier accounts of the West, accounts that Bhaskar had himself thought to 'non-preservatively sublate'–that is, reject!–in his earlier dialectical work. The Eastern concepts either shadow earlier dialectical concepts *(avidya, maya),* or provide a mystical colour *(karma, dharma)* to a process of demediation, dehistoricisation and deprocessualisation of the self from geo-history, the concept at the core of *Dialectic*. *Dialectic* contains a conflict between the real and the irreal: *FETW* seeks to repress it by affirming a transcendental idealism.

Despite its radical ambition, this ends up being a much more conservative work than the classical Bhaskarian analyses of nature, society and the dialectic, and it is achieved only by going against much of what Bhaskar has previously achieved. Thus, the new transcendentalism has much more in common with the kinds of transcendental and objective idealism against which Bhaskar always railed rather than the critical and dialectical realism that has generally driven his thinking. Similarly, the ethically 'ideal real' is a very different animal from the insistence on the materially real, which grounds the previous work (even with its ambiguity). Finally, the new discussions of ultimata cover ground rejected in *Dialectic,* while the Dharmic Self threatens to tread all over the relational self of the earlier work. The Hegelian cat has truly been let out of the bag.

All this is achieved at a price, and we conclude this part by asking the following question: what kind of soul inhabits *FETW*? In discussing categorial and dispositional realism, ultimata and the self, we have been struck by the split and antinomial character of the concepts Bhaskar now deploys. There are what one might call transcendentalisms 1 and 2, the real and the 'ideally real', material and ur-ultimata, and the self and the Self. This is striking precisely because the Bhaskar of DCR is the philosopher who has pinned down split as a fundamental feature of modern Western philosophy, and now he appears subject to it himself. What are we to make of this? A favoured figure in Bhaskar's *Plato Etc (1994). FETW* is Hegel's 'beautiful soul', a character who 'is isolated from his community. Pure unto himself, he is alienated from the society and world he must inhabit and upon which he ultimately depends' (2000:56). A close counterpart is the 'unhappy consciousness' who is 'divided between the this-worldly immanent relative world and the other-worldly transcendent absolute world, a split he cannot reconcile' *(ibid.)*.

Plato Etc. and *Dialectic* are places where Bhaskar sought to move beyond these two figures, and where he saw Hegel's œuvre as failing to do so. *FETW,* by contrast, seems to be inhabited by them: the book, it might be suggested, describes the odyssey not just of a soul, as it's subtitle supports, but of one that is 'beautiful'. The retreat to the beautiful soul complex is born out of a rebalancing in *FETW* of realism and irrealism in decisive favour of the latter. In the next section, we consider the roots of this dialectical complex in Bhaskar's earlier work.

Bhaskar and Habermas

An investigation of the moral theory of *FETW* raises questions about the development of tensions between two kinds of dialectics within Bhaskar's work: a dialectic of realist and irrealist dialectics. A helpful way of tracing this dialectic is to examine Bhaskar's attitude to the ethical approach of Jürgen Habermas, a figure who has been a 'significant other' in his work. The interesting point here is that a close examination of Bhaskar's progressive development reveals an instructively ambivalent attitude towards Habermas. This ambivalence reflects, we argue, the tension between realism and irrealism in Bhaskar's work. After firstly considering this relationship, we then investigate the roots of the tension between realism and irrealism in Bhaskar's philosophical anthropology, which

emerges as his ethics develops, and which takes the form of a tension between foundationalist and anti-foundationalist claims in the proto-dialectical arguments of his earlier work, *Scientific Realism and Human Emancipation (1986).*

What is at stake with Habermas

Something of what might be at stake when considering Bhaskar's view of Habermas is revealed in a brief exchange between Andrew Collier, Bhaskar and Alan Norrie in an edited collection of critical realist writings (Archer *et al.* 1998). In his review of *Dialectic,* Collier (in *ibid.*) took Bhaskar to task for, as he argued, the Kantian and Habermasian nature of his ethics. What was needed was rather a *materiale Wertethic* (a 'substantive theory of ethical worth'). For Collier, the ethics of *Dialectic,* while echoing a number of different approaches, are significantly limited by their Kantianism. The relevant aspect 'is the principle of universalisability, defended through the notion that the non-universalising agent is involved in a theory/practice contradiction or heterologicality'. It is supplemented 'by the idea that since every action aims at absenting some constraint, the agent is committed by universalisability to freedom in general' (Archer *et al.* 1998:692). The first of these two aspects reflects Habermas's idea of an ideal community implicit in communication. While Collier does not reject this 'Kantian turn' in critical realist ethics, he does point to some of the problems involved in the idea of universalising freedom, and he goes on to conclude that, echoing well-known criticisms of both Kant and Habermas, such an approach is limited by its formalism. What is needed, he suggests, is a sense that the universalisation of morals must in each case be grounded in the nature of the case, a *materiale Wertethic (ibid.).*

To this criticism, Bhaskar and Norrie responded by suggesting that Collier had missed the difference between the ethics of *Dialectic* and ethical formalism. In *Dialectic,* Bhaskar had insisted

> [t]hat the principle of dialectical universalisability is mediated through all the moments of the concrete (not abstract or purely formal, but dialectical and singularised) universal. This will include *inter alia* the dimensionalities of four-planar social being, the specificity of Power$_2$ relations and the uniqueness of the individual human being. In this, social science/knowledge plays a crucial role in terms of explaining the real location of agents in social and natural relations as the basis for assertoric statements as to what the agent ought to do.
>
> (Archer *et al.* 1998:572)

Furthermore, in *Plato Etc.* (1994:110), Bhaskar had used Sir Isaiah Berlin's famous example of the most accurate description of the Holocaust as being the most morally explicit and truthful ('the Jews were murdered') in order to argue that 'the most adequate description of a phenomenon will be that entailed by the theory which *maximises explanatory power*'. Such a criterion of adequacy could then provide the substantive basis for 'the dialectics of assertorically sensitised solidarity' (Archer *et al.* 1998:572).

Thus the argument was that the disclosure of substantive ethical considerations may be achieved in a movement from dialectical critical realist philosophical abstractions to the concrete-in-thought, embodying assertoric (rather than categorical) moral statements. This cognitive relation between the abstract and the concrete is mediated by developments within and between each of the dimensions of the concrete universal. It is this movement away from the abstract-in-thought which enables Bhaskar to avoid the criticism of Kantian formalism. We think that Bhaskar's conception of the concrete universal is an important one, and that it should be developed for ethical argument. However, this must be done with care, given that the concrete universal remains necessarily incomplete within a world characterised by open totality and absence. We do not develop this here, though we return to it briefly in our conclusion. Instead, we want to consider how Bhaskar himself develops his concept of the concrete universal through engagement with Habermas. We argue that from Bhaskar's relation to Habermas an irrealist Kantian reading of the real concrete universal has indeed emerged. There is some truth in Collier's criticism. This reading has come increasingly to dominate the development of his system, culminating in its triumph in *FETW*. However, because Bhaskar's longstanding commitment throughout his philosophy as a whole has been to realism, this sets up a tension between the two philosophers.

Bhaskar for Habermas

In a 1980 paper, Bhaskar wrote 'I owe much to […] Jürgen Habermas […], even where (as will be obvious) I come to rather different conclusions' (1989:202). This suggests a common core of argument, coupled with an *extension* of Habermas's theory, which is the gist of the following:

> There is much that is valuable to be rescued from [Habermas], including a transcendental argument from language as a universal and necessary medium of discourse (rather than the coping stone of the sciences and a fortiori of being) to a materialistically mediated conatus to consensus, if only it were set in a critical naturalist and transcendental realist perspective.
>
> (1989:189)

Similarly, in *Scientific Realism and Human Emancipation* (1986), which also dates from the early eighties, Bhaskar supports and extends Habermas's position. Arguing, quite properly, that values must be immanent as latent or partially manifested tendencies in our practices, Bhaskar states that this is also the feature on which Habermas's deduction of speech-constitutive universals turns. However, he then proceeds to extend the Habermasian position, which treats the linguistic dimension of social practice as if it were a discreet practice, to other dimensions of social interaction which *should be similarly treated*:

> But if there is a sense in which the ideal community, founded on principles of truth, freedom and justice, is already present as a prefiguration in every

> speech-interaction, might one not be tempted to suppose that equality, liberty and fraternity are present in every transaction or material exchange; or that respect and mutual recognition are contained in the most casual reciprocated glance? It is an error to suppose that ethics must have a linguistic foundation; just as it is an error to suppose that it is autonomous from science or history. (1986:210)

Bracket the final sub-clause for a moment and the main force of the argument is to extend the idea of a singular dialectical universalisability derived from speech to a multiplicity of dialectics issuing from a variety of committing practices. This is an argument that runs throughout Bhaskar's work, emerging again in *Dialectic* (1993, Chapter 3), and especially in *Plato Etc.* (1994), in which we are told that a 'reconciliation with Habermas's communicative action theory can be effected by recognising that axiological commitment and the dialectic of solidarity' (that is, the extended Bhaskarian dialectic of assertorically sensitised solidarity) is implicit 'in every veracious judgement or speech act' (1994:159).

Bhaskar against Habermas

This alignment of Bhaskar and Habermas seems clear, but note the final 'error' that we just bracketed in the last quotation: the error of autonomising ethics from science and history. Here is the basis for a dramatic turn in Bhaskar's attitude, because he identifies this error precisely *with* Habermas's work. This ambivalence reflects Bhaskar's ambiguity with regard to realist and irrealist dialectics, for Habermas's autonomisation of speech is precisely one form of autonomisation of ethics from science and history, and therefore entails irreal ontological failure. Bhaskar wants both to extend Habermas in the direction of dialectical universalisability and, at the same time, to draw a line against him on the ground of his lack of a realist ontology.

We do not think he can do both. A question may be put in the following terms. Just before aligning himself with Habermas in *Scientific Realism and Human Emancipation,* Bhaskar had insisted that any 'potentially emancipatory discourse, given the [Transformative Model of Social Action] and the general conception of an open world, can only co-determine action in an already pre-structured, practical and collective context' (1986:210). If such an ethical discourse is itself 'co-determined' by historical emergence, to what extent is it developed *out of history,* and to what extent is it developed out of (what appear to be) *discreet processes of dialectical universalisability*? Can it be developed out of both and, if so, on what terms? If it cannot, where does that leave the argument by extension from Habermas?

Let us explore further just what Bhaskar's opposition to Habermas is. On what is wrong with Habermas, Bhaskar has been as consistent in his criticisms as he has been elsewhere in giving him support. In *Reclaiming Reality,* Bhaskar criticises Habermas for his antinomialism and for his ontological empiricism.

Habermas is against ontology, but that just means that he adopts a particular, inadequate positivist ontology, as well as an inadequate 'instrumentalistmanipulative conception of the interests informing the natural, or later the empirical-analytical and purposive-rational, sciences' (Bhaskar 1989:188). Most importantly, this inadequate conceptualisation of knowledge and ontology directly feeds into the inadequacy of his ethics. As his 'emancipatory interest is derivative from his communicative interest, his system readily takes on a dualistic anti-naturalist hue'. In this, 'the extra-communicative or extra-discursive constraints on communicative interaction […] are marginalised' only to reappear 'in the guise of the colonisation of the lifeworld by the reified systems of economy and polity' *(ibid.)*. This returns Habermas to antinomy, between 'phenomenal system and noumenal lifeworld', and underpinning this is the theory of commimicative action, which Bhaskar describes as a 'magnificent, if Fichtean, construction', a '*Sollen* or ought, an infinite striving' based on language. Thus, at the root of all that is thoroughly deficient in Habermas lies, as we have seen, this theory that Bhaskar wants to build on and reconcile with Habermas's view that '[o]ur first sentence expresses unequivocally the intention of universal and unconstrained consensus' (Habermas, quoted in Bhaskar 1989:189).

To push this further, there is, says Bhaskar, a 'fundamental flaw in Habermas's Kantian project of attempting to render ontological mediations as epistemological divisions' (1986:231). It involves an 'irrealist, unstratified, actualist, and […] closed ontology–and in particular an insufficiently stratified and distanciated concept of the self and space-time' (1993:148). This means that his ethical truth claims work 'only under the special conditions of the ideal speech situation, or discourse or a lifeworld uncontaminated by system, and many critics have focused on the lack of an "evidential dimension" in Habermas's work' (1994:143). If the core innovation of Bhaskar's critical realist dialectics is the reaffirmation of real ontological features of depth, space, time, absence, emergence and open totality, how can he develop his ethical theory on the basis of an extension of Habermas's irrealist, positivist, linguistified speech community? Bhaskar cannot extend Habermas on the basis of everything that he, Bhaskar, is most fundamentally against, yet that is just what he wants, and does not want, to do.

Bhaskar as anti-foundationalist and as a foundationalist

This takes us to a deeply rooted antinomy in Bhaskar's work, linked to the dialectic of the real and the irreal, which sees him first argue against, then for, an ethical foundation in the basic nature of human being. When he argues against it, he develops the realist dialectic in his work; when he argues for it, he encourages its irrealist side. An earlier form of this antinomy is to be found in *Scientific Realism and Human Emancipation* (1986:200–211), in which he considers the significance of realist-based 'depth inquiry' (D-I) for ethics and emancipation. A D-I is 'any

co-operative enquiry […] into the structure of some presumed set of mechanisms, constituting for [an] agent an unwanted source of determination, with a view to initiating, preserving or restoring the agent's well-being' (1986:202). Such well-being is the ethical *telos*. It includes the ability to think and act rationally, but what this means cannot be determined *a priori,* cannot be conceived universally or monolithically, cannot be exclusively cognitive or epistemic in character, and cannot be equivalent to consistency in argument. This is because we are dealing here with the 'rationality of a (line of) historical action'. This position, we will now argue, grounds Bhaskar's realist anti-foundationalism.

Bhaskar as ontological anti-foundationalist

The concept of a D-I is thus understood in the context of a realist ontology of structures, relations, historical emergence, and so on. It is fundamentally opposed to idealist or irrealist understandings of well-being and it prepares the ground for an ontological anti-foundationalist stance. Take rationality for example. In the light of D-I, rationality is not essentially cognitive, but is–*pace* Habermas–historical and fluid, because we are in a world of interdependent and historically changing relations. Similarly, take emancipation. There is no direct link between an ethic of emancipation and its being put into practice. Such an ethic cannot be posited *a priori* or predicted to emerge in historicist fashion just because we know what the emancipatory problem is. It is not a necessary truth that people always operate on their emancipatory needs and interests, even if they act on their wants. Thus, an ethical D-I operates in a different way to a 'normal' ethical account of emancipation. It posits *another level of explanation,* a 'meta-ethical level', that is required to investigate the relationship between an emancipatory drive and an explanatory theory that manages to both develop some criticism while also acting as *a brake* upon emancipation.

This further level, essentially dependent on depth ontology, and separating off any cognitivist ethics from a critical realist ethics, is crucial to Bhaskar's analysis. It might be thought of as driving big nails into the coffin of any Bhaskar-Habermas entente. Bhaskar stresses that 'cognitive emancipation depends in general upon non-cognitive conditions' and that 'constraints upon cognitive emancipation itself are imposed by the imbrication of ideologies into the practical contours fixed by the material imperatives in social life […], by the preformation of ideational contents […] and by the projects of others' (1986:205).

The historicisation of rationalities (the 'imbrication of ideologies', the 'preformation of ideational contents'), together with the discovery of a meta-level above emancipatory theory and political practice, marks a clear separation from any epistemically grounded ethics. Most importantly, however, it also sets its face more broadly against *any* ahistorical foundation in 'human nature' or the 'human condition'. If Habermas is guilty of a form of the *epistemic fallacy,* an alternative mirror error, the *ontic fallacy,* awaits anyone who would ground ethics more broadly in a direct or unmediated understanding of being. Bhaskar may be an ontologist, but he is not an ontic ethicist: the 'thrownness' of being, and reasoning about

being, in historical development draws a line separating off the ontic (as well as the epistemic) fallacy in his work. Thus he writes that 'socialised nature is in itself in continuous transformation' so that 'nothing of empirical import follows from […] analytic truth'. This means that

> [t]here can be no *a priori* guarantee that it is only in human nature or a particular agent's nature to do what is conducive to her survival, flourishing, happiness, wellbeing *even* if she knows what this is: only an historical experience, incorporating the D-I, can disclose [this].
>
> (1986:205)

It is crucial to understand what Bhaskar is saying here. The issue of the 'question behind the question', which is the historical question of how ideology blocks a direct statement of what the (epistemic or ontic) foundations of morality are, inserts a level into the analysis of ethics and emancipation that cannot be bypassed in moral theory. The next pages of *SRHE* repeat this argument in different ways and it is worth quoting in length what Bhaskar has to say to make the point clearly:

> On [the royal] road [to science], the question which interests us is no longer merely the simple one of the causes of belief and action, it is the question of the causes of these causes: it thus presupposes an ontological *stratification* within the constitution of our theoretical and practical agency which classical philosophy and common sense join hands in denying […] *To stress, the explanatory critical discourse is not about whether we may be said to act or choose or believe or know, it is about the structural sources of the options from which we, in our everyday practices, more or less freely, choose*. This is a question which can only be taken up by the depth human sciences […] In the human sciences the problem of error, oppression, etc. must thus be fused–in the explanatory critical D-I–with the problem of the causes of error, oppression, etc. as part of the programme […] of the investigation of the shifting deep structures, moving like continental plates, producing, in myriad forms, the turbulences and routines of our historical experience, the manifest phenomenology of everyday life.
>
> (1986:206–7; second emphasis added)

This is nothing less than an *Aufhebung* of the matter of ethics away from illicitly abstract universality deployed by 'classical philosophy and common sense' and onto the terrain of differentiated, stratified and historical being. It is an insistence that 'human nature' cannot be foundational, except insofar as human nature is taken to be social and historical in its foundations so that it changes and evolves in an intra-relational, structured, dynamic way. Human being is species being, species being is social being, social being is historical being, and historical being is subject to absence and change. But surely, it will be said, there are common facts about human being that transcend the historical, and which operate as an unmediated basis for common conjecture about the nature of the species? Of course, Bhaskar

recognises the need for a language of human commonality, but acknowledges that one requirement of such a language is to sustain the fact that this commonality, in virtue of its historical dimension, is not substantive and cannot be expressed in substantive terms. It seems, he agrees, 'grossly implausible to suppose that human beings do not, qua human beings, share characteristics […] which differentiate them as members of the same species'. But this 'common nature'

> [i]s never expressed in anything but thoroughly socialised, more or less historically specific and very highly differentiated forms. *We cannot identify a common nature under psycho-socially meaningful descriptions* […] Essential forms of a psycho-social kind […] are the products of prior transformations and/or in the process of contemporary transformation and/or subject to the possibility of future transformation.
>
> (1986:208; emphasis added)

Bhaskar as ontological foundationalist

All this seems very clear. Bhaskar is engaged in the urgent task of developing an abstract conception of the common, transhistorical, features of social being, that is, what will become after *Dialectic* a dialectical critical realist philosophical anthropology. It is one that will not do certain things. First and foremost, it will not ground an ethics in an ontic essence of human being. Yet, as he develops his argument in *Scientific Realism and Human Emancipation* (1986), Bhaskar moves to reinstate within his anthropology the very thing that he would deny, a sense of a common human nature cutting against and across the social and the historical. The argument has two aspects. The first we have already identified: the acceptance of the Habermasian account of the specifically linguistic dimension of social practice as a discreet social practice and the extension of this argument to a range of social practices. The second foreshadows the irrealist ontology further developed in *FETW*. It involves 'componentialising' (Bhaskar's word) social being into three parts. They are: (i) 'a common human nature, grounded in genetic structure and manifested in certain species-wide capacities'; (ii) an 'historically specific nature' deriving from class, gender, and so on; and (iii) 'a more or less unique individuality' (1986:208). It is the character of the division between (i) and (ii) that is crucial for the development of his ethical argument; for what the componentialisation, that is, autonomisation, of (i) licences, Bhaskar now argues, is the 'supposition of the existence of universal powers (and liabilities), certainly needs and very probably wants (and so interests)' (1986:209). Before long, we have an ontic justification for human rights:

> If moral discourse is […] grounded in historical anthropology and this is componentialised in the manner just proposed, then […] it makes sense to ascribe the *existence* of rights (and goods) for all human beings *qua* human beings, in virtue of their possession of a common (although always historically

> mediated) nature, ultimately grounded in their biological unity as a species, composed in particular of common powers and needs […], even though these rights (and goods) can only come to be formulated as demands, recognised as legitimate and exercised as rights under very definite historical conditions.
>
> (1986:209)

Note, however, that this argument only works if the conditional clause which introduces it is valid. '*If* moral discourse is […] grounded in historical anthropology and this is componentialised in the manner just proposed', then one has established a foundation on which an ontically derived basis for human nature can be achieved. But 'componentialisation' is just what Bhaskar's previous argument does not license, the separation out of an ontic basis for substantive ethical conclusions.

'Componentialisation' as false separation

At the end of the passages we have just quoted, Bhaskar anticipatorily attacks those who would deny his ontic derivation of moral value as committing the epistemic fallacy:

> To collapse a right to the historical conditions of its recognition, realisation or exercise is to commit some ethical form […] of the epistemic fallacy, grounded in the actualist collapse of anthropology.
>
> (1986:209)

Does our argument make us prone to this criticsm? We would argue, firstly, that to follow Bhaskar in identifying the meta-level produced by depth inquiry is indeed to argue against his 'componentialising' strategy, but it is not to collapse a right to its historical conditions. Rather, it is to understand that rights are real but that they have their specific forms of existence within historical conditions. It is also to see that the nature of human being involves conceiving the historical movement of the human and the social as one movement that can only be 'componentialised' by a process of false separation. Bhaskar knows this, as when he writes that '[w]e cannot identify a common nature under psycho-socially meaningful descriptions' (1986:208), but that is Bhaskar the realist talking, while 'componentialisation' is a means of establishing an irreal foundation to ethics.

Secondly, we would say that to argue as we do, and as Bhaskar does himself in the main part of the section in *Scientific Realism and Human Emancipartion* (1986) that we have just been exploring, is not to commit a variant of the epistemic fallacy. Rather, it is to avoid committing an ethical version of the ontic fallacy, of determining knowledge from being. Bhaskar's dialectical critical *realism,* both in *Scientific Realism and Human Emancipation* (1986) and in later work such as *Dialectic* (1993), refuses this move and that is why it is able to identify the ontic fallacy as

the dialectical pair of the epistemic fallacy. The ambivalence over Habermas, together with the push and pull over foundationalism, are nonetheless indicative of an underlying dialectic of real and irreal dialectics in his work, and it is to that dialectic that we now turn in the conclusion to our argument.

Conclusion

If we look at Bhaskar's ambivalence towards Habermas, and see how it underpins the conflict between foundationalist and anti-foundationalist arguments in *Scientific Realism and Human Emancipation,* we think that there is a strong connection between the temptation to stray into foundational irrealist argument in this work and the latest 'ideal realism' of *FETW*. The realist critique that undermines *FETW* is precisely the critique that generates the anti-foundationalist argument in *Scientific Realism and Human Emancipation*. We have used Bhaskar against himself here. Likewise, the idealist position that drives *FETW* is a close relation to the componentialising strategy in *Scientific Realism and Human Emancipation.* The common bloodstock is irrealism in the positing of an ideal human universal essence separated off by 'componentialisation', and this runs wild throughout the new categorial realism of *FETW*. Thus what we see here are two stages in a dialectic of realism and irrealism in Bhaskar's work, and a shift in their balance as irrealism takes over in *FETW*. The crucial intermediary in this development is of course *Dialectic,* which we focused on when exposing the irrealism of *FETW*. We see that latter work, with its emphasis on the critique of both irrealism and ontological monovalence on the one hand, and its insistence on a variety of dialectical drives to universality and freedom (in Chapter 3 of *Dialectic*) on the other, as representing a dialectical stand-off between dialectics of realism and irrealism.

Turning to the concrete universal, we find a figure that is central to Bhaskar's specifically dialectical work, which is consistent with the unseparated conception of human being in *Scientific Realism and Human Emancipation,* and which we believe lies at the core of his realist ethics. The concrete universal consists of four irreducible and mutually constituting moments: universality, specificity, individuality and processuality. The first three terms relate to the different levels of generality of existence, while the fourth term indicates the intrinsic dynamics of existence that must be conceptualised quite differently at each of these levels. Conceptualising the dimension of universality of social being is the role of philosophy. It has two aspects, one ontological, the other anthropological. The first is the general ontology of DCR, the 1M to 4D schema, while the anthropological aspect encompasses the transhistorical commonalities of specifically social being, the radical conception of processual entity relationism of stratified selves in four-planar being. These dimensions of our being have no independent or autonomous existence from our specificity or individuality. Each exists only in and through the others. So, in relation to social being, for instance, the mutual constitution of the universal and the individual dimensions reinforces the contention that our common nature 'is never expressed in anything but thoroughly socialised, more or less historically specific and very highly differentiated forms' (1986:208).

From the perspective of the unity of the concrete universal, the 'componentialisation' of social being is clearly a form of illicit abstraction. The effect of erroneously casting distinctions between internally related dimensions of social being in terms of componential separation is to legitimate the possibility of a thing's existence and development at one level of generality being demediatied from its existence and development at others. It paves the way for separating off the historical from the ethical. It establishes the irrealist plane of demediated universality on which Bhaskar develops his dialectics of idealisation. But ethics simply cannot be developed at the level of the universal alone. Philosophical abstractions are confined to the level of universality and as such can be no more than an underlabourer for ethics.

Concrete universality is the condition of human being in all its manifestations, and only this gives rise to the ethical. It is the position of both totality and individuality, the point of emergence and the pointer to change (the absenting of absence). This indicates both its present and its future-oriented character, which in turn stipulates its incompleteness in a world open to change (an open totality). This suggests a world of ethical process oriented around human being, its structural possibilities and absences, its historical achievements, its failures and limits. It is a world in which positioned and practising actors live more and less ethical lives depending upon location and individual circumstance, in which critical reflection upon our lives is possible and necessary for change, but not sufficient. It is a world in which our ethics are rooted for good or bad, are 'thrown' just as we are **'thrown'**. Around this conception of the concrete universal it is possible to think ethically without having recourse to abstract universals which are demediated, often impotent and/or misleading. Indeed, we have no choice but to do so. It is a world in which ethics are real and grounded, but not founded in a state of species being which guarantees our social being. We believe this more modest ethical view to be the true message of Bhaskar's dialectical critical realism.

Notes

1 All quotes in this section are from *FETW,* unless stated to the contrary.

2 Two prefatory comments about the form of *FETW* and the nature of its task. It is written in two parts, one of which is a conventional philosophical essay, the other an 'adventure story' of the journey of a Soul through fifteen reincarnations across time and space. Bhaskar wrote *FETW* as a bridge between what he sees as two ways of thinking, but also as a bridge between Western intellectual movements–'New Age' and 'New Left'–and therefore between two audiences, one with, the other without, a 'formal philosophical background' (2000:2). Bhaskar anticipates the difficulties that the first part will have for the philosophically untrained, but equally significant is the difficulty that the philosophically (more broadly, academically) trained will have with the second part. We have chosen to focus on the theoretical part in this review because that is where the main arguments are to be found. This is also justified in that these arguments represent the culmination of the thinking developed by the final life in Part II(I), therefore constituting both an introduction to and summation of the developments in the book as a whole.

3 In confronting this issue Bhaskar is addressing an unresolved problem which has emerged in the history of Marxism. Communism was Marx's conception of the ideal social condition. It also provided the standpoint from which capitalism was so harshly judged. (See, for instance, Bertell Ollman's *Alienation* (1971).) What was it that made the concept of communism anything more than a mere idealisation of the human condition? Its realist status was confirmed by its apparently real historical possibility, the fact that proletarian development seemed to embody a tendency towards its realisation. In communism, Marx united the ideal and the possible as the *telos* of humanity. However, historical defeats during Marx's own time, not to mention the twentieth century, led Marx to continue to develop the realist philosophical ontology of social being he required for his scientific work. These developments, needed to address questions concerning different possible historical trajectories, increasingly generated tensions between Marx's scientific and moral realism and the moral ideal to which he was committed throughout. (See, for instance, Etienne Balibar's *The Philosophy of Marx* (1995).)

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Part II

Social science and critique after the linguistic turn

3 Feminism, critical realism and the linguistic turn

Caroline New

From facts to values: feminist social criticism

Until very recently, feminism has always been ethically naturalist, arguing from facts to values, as befits the belief system of a liberation movement. Facts: in most respects women *are* similar to men, and in those respects *should be* treated similarly, other things being equal. Where there are no ontological grounds for doing so, different treatment constitutes *mis*treatment.[1] For example, women's intellects and reproductive systems are functionally separable, as are men's, so banning women from higher education in the nineteenth century on the grounds that too much brainwork would bring about the shrivelling of breasts and wombs was unjust (Sayers 1982). Facts: in some respects women *are* different from men, and similar treatment disadvantages them. Values: other things being equal, in those respects women *should be* treated differently in appropriate ways. For example, unlike men's, women's reproduction *necessarily* involves for a period of time a close physical contact with another being, a relationship whose flourishing is partly incompatible with capitalist conditions of work. Over the life cycle, 'equal' treatment on the labour market disadvantages women, so equity requires various forms of 'positive action' and 'positive discrimination', or a reworking of the relationship between waged work and childcare.[2] The details of all of this are highly contested, for example, between Marxist feminists and ecofeminists, and between different strands within each of these and other approaches, but the structure of the argument remains the same.

Feminism has historically involved unpicking, spelling out and evaluating current views of the similarities and differences between women and men. It has involved a labour of investigating which of these differences are context-specific and/or temporary, which general and/or enduring, and what tendencies result. 'Facts' are produced through a process which is conceptual as well as investigative. They do not lie on the surface of the world to be taken in by perception alone, but the deeper structures of the world are nonetheless *discovered* rather than being entirely discursive. Chronologically, value systems may precede facts in the sense that they motivate and frame particular investigations, but such investigations cannot create the structures of reality that are their referents, and wrong

conceptualisations eventually become practically inadequate (Sayer 1992). Logically, and ontologically, facts precede the value statements for which they constitute evidence.

Feminists have drawn value conclusions from what is known about the natures of sexed humans, and have then tried to work out what institutions, actions and practices might replace 'an unwanted with a wanted source of determination' (Bhaskar 1998:434), and how this might be brought about. Liberal and socialist feminists have done this quite openly, but radical or 'revolutionary' feminists have sometimes been less clear about their social programme because of their rejection of reformism. Nevertheless, exposures of hidden misogyny, such as Mary Daly's *Gyn/ecology* (1979), which claims that foot-binding, witch-burning, clitoridectomy, suttee and Western obstetrics are all women-hating, gynocidal practices disguised by 'distancing' discourses, share the same logic. They expose particular beliefs as untrue, and particular states of affairs as harmful, and conclude that these and whatever brings them about should be changed to get rid of that untruth and that harm. This is criticism: it becomes explanatory critique when the mechanisms through which the untrue or harmful state of affairs is brought about, believed, maintained and justified, are identified and explained.

I shall argue that explanatory critiques are essential to any consistent and effective feminism, that such critiques must necessarily be realist, and that to be adequate to their object they must be critical realist (or at least 'depth realist'). The feminist critique of science started off as realist, but because it was not *critically* realist it lacked an understanding of emergence and the stratification of reality. It paid dear for these omissions, being unable to defend itself against post-structuralist critique.[3] Through the linguistic turn, judgemental relativism and idealism became dominant in feminist scholarship, with disastrous consequences. Explanatory critiques became impossible, feminist solidarity was seen as ungrounded and contingent, and this in turn was lauded as a virtue. The split between feminist intellectuals and women struggling against oppression was exacerbated.[4] I shall argue that critical realism has the potential to be of great value to feminism for several reasons, and not only because it can offer philosophical grounding for ethical naturalism and thus for explanatory critiques. Critical realism is also valuable to feminist theory for its clear distinction between the transitive and intransitive realms; for its distinction between epistemic and judgemental relativism, and its acceptance of the former and rejection of the latter; for its fallibilism; and, most importantly, for its understanding of stratification, and therefore of transfactuality.

Explanatory critiques and moral communities

In its classic form, discussed by Bhaskar in *The Possibility of Naturalism* (1989), the explanatory critique moves from a false belief to an explanation of how and why the belief is generated and reproduced–through what processes, through whose action, at whose behest and in whose interests–and from there to the negative

valuation of the institutions and practices which bring about such false beliefs. This negative valuation follows from the positive value we must all put on truth, for 'that truth *is* a good *(ceteris paribus)* is not only a condition of moral discourse, it is a condition of any discourse at all' (Bhaskar 1989:63). Simple criticism shows the inadequacy of 'Hume's Law' (that we cannot move from 'is' to 'ought'), but

> [in the] absence of any causal grounding […] it cannot illuminate the topic of the transformation of the sources of determination from unnecessary to rationally wanted ones. Only a discourse in which the explanatory as well as the critical condition is satisfied can be intrinsically emancipatory.
>
> (Bhaskar 1998:416)

Explanatory critique shows that the so-called 'naturalistic fallacy' is no fallacy but a precondition of argument, including of philosophy itself (Bhaskar and Collier 1998).

Explanatory critiques take a different form when institutions and practices are criticised–for causing harm rather than for bringing about false beliefs: that is, 'such "practical ills" as ill-health, misery, repression, including the socio-economic ills of oppression, brutality, war, exploitation, poverty, waste etc.' together with 'psycho-social ills' and 'communicative ills' amounting to 'such generic ills as frustrated needs […], subjection, unused resources, or underdeveloped powers […], unfulfilled possibilities and thwarted […] intentionality […], plus gross inequalities in the distribution of powers and liabilities between agents' (Bhaskar 1998:426).

Feminism provides examples of both kinds of explanatory critiques, based on 'truth is a good' and on 'human flourishing is a good', respectively. Feminists have often exposed false beliefs about women–such as the 'myth of the vaginal orgasm' (Koedt 1968)–and simultaneously offered explanations of how and why these false beliefs are generated and believed. Almost invariably they go on to show that false beliefs about women's nature result in suffering and limitations, or in other cases begin by showing that institutions (such as marriage) have harmful effects on women, how and why that comes about, and conclude that the states of affairs in question should therefore be ended or transformed (Delphy and Leonard 1992). The unstated premise of the move from such exposition of a social situation to the advocacy of social change is that 'suffering should be prevented, and human needs met, *ceteris paribus'* (the other side of the coin of the truism that human flourishing is a good). But while the goodness of truth is a condition of discourse, that human needs should be met, other things being equal, is not a condition of discourse in general, nor even, at first sight, of all moral discourse.

In a move strikingly reminiscent of Habermas, Bhaskar tries to ground needs-based explanatory critiques by referring to '*non-cognitive* conditions […] for discourse […] in general to be possible', such as 'a degree of good health and the absence of marked asymmetries in political, economic and the other modalities of power' (1998:427). This would allow a relation of entailment between 'is' and 'ought', as

in the classic explanatory critique. But, in my view, this is intuitively implausible. It is not only because health is conducive to *discourse* that we value it, nor is it only those sorts of health which we value. It is rather because health, and other goods, are relevant to human flourishing in a wider sense; to all sorts of agency, not only the capacity to communicate discursively Collier writes:

> [W]hile there is no formal contradiction involved in admitting that something is a human need but denying that it should (other things being equal) be satisfied, such a position can be said, in a looser way, not to *make sense* […] Once it is conceded that, for example, children have a basic need to play (will have wretched childhoods and become inhibited and miserable adults, lacking in skills and social skills if they are prevented from playing), then it makes no sense to ask 'but ought children to be allowed to play?'—unless on the basis of some exceptional 'other thing' that is not equal (e.g. in the present famine, we will all starve if the children don't spend all their time helping to get food).
>
> (1994:183)

This is basically right. Similarly, statements such as 'these practices are harmful to women, but they should continue' *do not make sense* in the absence of a very impressive *ceteris paribus* clause—assuming that women are accepted as part of the moral community. Given that moral discourse is concerned with how human beings should best live, it's quite true that it does not 'make sense' to have *moral* objections to human flourishing, however differently different groups define it. In Collier's example, some religious groups for whom transcendental, not just earthly, flourishing is involved might see children's souls as threatened by too much play. In that case, they would not concede the need to play, so his point stands. Despite such difference we can infer certain very broad cross-cultural moral principles from the way the world is structured, including from how humans are constituted, and the consequent preconditions of human social life. Thus, caring for children will be valued everywhere, though differently understood (because of different views on the ontology of the cosmos and the way its elements are related). As Collier argues, facts do not *create* values out of nothing: 'Theories can have practical consequences, but only because we are all already valuing various things, as an inevitable part of living' (1994:179). We can therefore move from facts about the world, including human nature and human social life, to the value of certain practices or states of affairs which meet human needs and promote their flourishing.

However, in assuming a certain sort of modern secular moral discourse, in which the boundaries of the human are also those of our moral community, Collier moves rather too quickly to this conclusion. For some groups the statement 'children have a basic need to play' would be taken as implying only that '*our* children should be allowed to play'. The children of others might be considered subhuman and outside the moral community, enemies whose destruction is a good, or simply not our concern. Feminists and various minorities

(for example, disabled people and gipsies) know that the boundaries of moral communities are themselves sites of struggle. Arguments in such struggles also move from facts to values, for example from facts about women to the value conclusion that they are fully human–that is, sufficiently relevantly similar to men to be accepted as a full part of the moral community. Critical realism allows us to tread where feminists are very reluctant to go, and to assert that the modern humanist extension of the moral community to at least 'all beings capable of speech and action' (in Benhabib's (1990:337) phrase), or better, to all humanity,[5] is *right*. It is right because of certain facts about human nature and human interdependence. This widest possible extension of 'reversibility' (of perspectives; that is, the act of judging from the other's point of view) and 'reciprocity' (of obligations) is treated by Benhabib as an ethical assumption, the 'historically self-conscious universalism' of modernity (1990:339). But where she insists that 'the appeal to moral psychology and development' can never allow us to move from 'ought' to 'is' (1990:338–9), critical realism can claim the extension of the moral community to all humans as an ontologically grounded ethical truth.[6] That human beings are such and such, both in species terms and in terms of our global interrelatedness, and that human moral discourse is such and such a sort of activity, together entail a value conclusion about what the boundaries of our moral community should be.

At the level of rhetoric, the battle to include women in the human moral community is largely won. For instance, the *Platform for Action* signed by governments attending the 1995 United Nations Fourth World Conference on Women in Beijing recognises the applicability of human rights–such as the right to education–to women and girls (United Nations 1996). It uses the language of formal equality, yet certain exceptions (such as sexual orientation, referred to only in coded forms in relation to sexual health) and odd signifiers of disputed areas (such as opposition only to 'forced' prostitution) exist; for the move fully to include women simply shifts the terrain of struggle to the question of what women are like, and what therefore constitutes an appropriate application of human rights to women. And for political struggle on *this* terrain, explanatory critiques are indispensable.

The value and limits of explanatory critiques

Explanatory critiques do not represent the whole of political argument, but they are essential to an emancipatory politics based in the nature of the world. They are inevitably contested in every detail and at every stage. However well grounded they are in social scientific investigation, they have no automatic power to move. Social movements carry explanatory critiques like banners (sometimes they have them neatly symbolised *on* their banners), and their capacity to change the world at a given time is a function of the current balance of power as well as the knowledge, strategy, tactics and determination of their bearers. Even when they partly win the argument by bringing about a re-evaluation of dominant views of what *is,* there is no easy progression to the

ought of political programmes: detailed normative argument is required to reach more than the formal conclusion 'This should be changed' or 'This is an ill which should be absented' (Sayer 2000). In common with Lacey (1998) and Collier (1998), Sayer criticises Bhaskar's ethics as too formal, as leaving us in the fairly abstract terrain of the drive to

> overthrow the totality of master-slave relations, and implant in their place a society based on a core equality between human beings by virtue of their shared species nature with differentiations justified by the concrete specificities and singularities, needs and powers of the particular individual.
>
> (Bhaskar 1993:287)

Frustrated with ethical abstractions, Sayer (2000) calls for further normative theory, including some version of discourse ethics. I have no quarrel with this, but I doubt whether discourse ethics can be any more definite about what should be done in concrete instances. Rather like ethical naturalism, all it can yield is broad principles of the morally permissible and impermissible (Benhabib 1990). Ethics cannot do the work of morality. As Bhaskar says: '[e]xactly and only what is to be done can rarely, if ever, be uniquely deduced from general maxims' (1998:423). To require that such deduction be possible fails to recognise the 'ineradicably openness', 'diversity' and 'historicity' of action situations: 'What follows from the collapse of any *normative actualism* […] is not the subjective […] character of normative discourse […] but the historically specific or mediated character of norms, understood tendentially as transfactually applicable' (Bhaskar 1998:423). We do indeed have to judge which of the alternatives that are ethically acceptable in general are morally desirable in context, and, to decide which feasible alternatives follow, we have to know something about our own powers and those around us. Even then we may have a choice. Sayer is right to call for a detailed critical realist normative theory, grounded in examples, but it will not solve our concrete dilemmas. It may be that several different and to some extent conflicting conclusions about the good life may equally be critical realist, and that for any one of these 'the CAJ [concrete axiological judgement] […] is grounded in purely factual considerations' *(ibid.)*.

One example might be the feminist critique of structural adjustment programmes (SAPs) imposed on poor countries by the World Bank or IMF as the condition for receiving a loan. Given certain features of the sexual division of labour, and local beliefs (often rooted in the custom of women joining their husbands' family) that girls are less important than boys, a common response to SAPs has been to save money by cutting girls' education, which feminists argue is unjust. But where do we go from here? Sayer rightly says that the main problem is often 'not removing a cause of suffering but finding an alternative that is less bad' (2000:169). Should education cuts be kept, but made equitable? Should some other public service be cut instead to meet IMF strictures? Or should SAPs themselves be opposed? And if so, what are the alternatives? There will not be one answer for all times and places; feasible alternatives will be conditioned by

the politics and strategies of movements, by the extent of public concern, and many other factors too numerous to list. To reach a judgement about action does not mean discarding explanatory critiques, but often extending their scope and depth.

Sayer also points out (as do many feminists) that cultural difference in relation to needs means that 'members of other cultures with different values […] may find those needs false or abhorrent' (2000:169). In such cases he believes that explanatory critiques are of limited value, and that we need something more like discourse ethics, which specifies the conditions for a democratic open-ended moral conversation (2000:167), and in the absence of such conditions gives those who have the power of choice the responsibility of imagining the views of others about the actions and their likely outcome. This sounds right, and we may well reach such a conclusion about how to proceed when both agreement and the conditions for equal dialogue are absent, by considering the effects of power differences on human relationships–that is, by ethically naturalist argument. But where dialogue is possible, whether equal or not, it inevitably argues from facts to values and often takes the form of explanatory critique. For example, the slogan 'Lesbian rights are human rights' was offensive to some cultural groups attending the 1995 non-governmental organisation (NGO) women's forum in Beijing. At one performance, I was sitting with some South Asian women of various religions who were offended by a faintly erotic lesbian poem. I heard conversations similar to the following, made possible in this instance by a meta-agreement to reach for an approximation to an ideal speech situation, despite the obstacles set by enormous differences in resources.

US LESBIAN: The oppression of lesbians has such-and-such harmful effects on my life. For example, I have lost custody of my children. It should be stopped. Its aim is to divide women.

CATHOLIC INDIAN WOMAN: I would agree that a practice that causes you pain by depriving you of your children should be stopped, *ceteris paribus,* but I doubt that you are a fit mother. Children need proper men and women in heterosexual relationships as role models if they are to grow up psychologically healthy and in ways acceptable to God. Your country is extremely decadent and women have been deceived as to their real interests by powerful but godless corporations.

Another Indian woman maintained that the campaign for lesbian rights was interfering in close relationships between women in her country by introducing the spectre of sexuality, and that this interference had overtones of imperialist domination. An African lesbian claimed in reply that there were many silenced lesbians in India, as in Africa, and what was coming between her interlocutor and her women friends was not lesbian campaigning but homophobia. Condensed explanatory critiques, usually drawing only on anecdotal evidence, were being used to demarcate and to test the boundaries of ethical and political agreement.

They are an essential part of such cross-cultural dialogue and thus of the process of working out issues of pluralism and tolerance. One reason why the linguistic turn in feminism, the turn away from realism, has been politically disastrous is because it has undermined explanatory critiques as a tool of feminist political argument.

The linguistic turn in feminism

By the 1990s, the 'First World' women's movements of the 1970s had fragmented into many non-governmental and a few governmental organisations and other 'social movement organisations', including single issue campaigns (Brenner 1996). Each did its own strategising and campaigning, sometimes joining together in coalitions, sometimes in ad hoc conferences, of which the biggest was the 1995 Beijing forum, which had no decision-making power. Feminism became both institutionalised and marginalised in the academy, in women's studies departments and in departments of sociology, philosophy and allied trades. Outside the academy, grassroots feminists sometimes attacked white, middleclass 'femocrats' for making a career out of the oppression of women. Within the academy, feminists were also attacked in various ways, of which a classic dual-pronged example was to characterise them as personally ugly and humourless, and as theoretically naïve, simplistic and essentialising. Against this background, the cultural turn was very attractive. 'Postie' feminists, post-Lacanian or deconstructionist, may now be invitingly sexy and challengingly pro-sex, while coolly maintaining the constructedness and contingency of sexual difference and sexual orientation. Who knows what they will do next? They may wear Wonderbras and lipstick, graft horns onto their foreheads, or grow beards. Their sophisticated insistence on undecidability and groundlessness amazes male colleagues, while their firm anti-colonialism confuses and deflects the Left. In Kemp's and Squires' (1997) formulation, 'feminists have gained legitimacy and respect within academia (whilst protesting the category "woman" and moving towards analysis of "gender") and […] women outside the academy continue to engage in political struggle whilst rejecting any definition of themselves as feminist' (1997:4). They go on to say that while second-wave feminists asked 'What is to be done ?', deconstructionist feminists ask 'What is the basis of my claim to knowledge?', and 'Who is the "I" that makes such a claim?'

Does this shift matter? Not to Kemp and Squires, apparently, whose reader endorses this new version of 'feminism'. From a critical realist point of view, such thinking is a diversion from the potentially useful role of feminist social science to produce explanatory critiques that can be used to oppose gender oppression. Even though NGOs, coalitions and other organisations continue campaigning against aspects of women's oppression, the linguistic turn has arguably damaged the process of building an international movement. It has meant that a large number of young activists are sidestepped into queer politics, into spectacle, into a Foucauldian idea of resistance without any structural analysis of the situation

and therefore without any strategy. However seemingly transgressive, 'the assertion of an individual right to sexual self-expression can be more easily marginalised by conservatives when the movements promoting it are silent about the ways in which late capitalism consistently denies the conditions of self-determination to most people' (Brenner 1996:63). The politics emerging from the work of post-structuralist feminist Chris Weedon are only superficially different. Weedon insists that deconstructive methods can be of service in 'decentring the hierarchical oppositions which underpin gender, race and class oppression and of instigating new, more progressive theories' (1997:160). Throughout, she emphasises relations of power and the materiality of discourse, so that it comes as something of a surprise to note that her 'strategies for change' focus very much on the power-knowledge relations of the literary discursive field. '[P]ower is exercised through the constitution of subjectivity within discourse and the production of social agents' (1997:163), but how these agents produce and potentially transform social structures outside text is sidestepped.

Postmodern feminism comes in many versions, some of which offer valuable perspectives. Most of them, though, are idealist, and as such deny the legitimacy of explanatory critiques. Weedon is quite open in her rejection:

> It is in making claims to truth that discourses demonstrate their inevitable conservatism, their investment in particular versions of meaning and their hostility to change […] For many years […] liberal feminists tried to establish that women's physiology did not render them incapable of educational and professional achievement. Attempts to use these discursive strategies to claim the truth of alternative scientific 'facts' about women's nature are, however, unlikely to succeed in radically transforming patriarchal structures and practices.
>
> (Weedon 1997:127)

This pessimism is not based on the likelihood of incorporation and collusion, but on the uselessness of opposing one 'claim to truth' rather than another, given the lack of any 'final guarantee' *(ibid.)*.[7] Weedon claims that postmodern feminist theory is fallibilistic, but of course its implicit position of 'No truth without guarantees, if no guarantees, no truth' makes that impossible. For realists, the potential emancipatory power of explanatory critiques comes from the fact that they are based on *discoveries* about the nature of the world. Their 'practical adequacy' (Sayer 1992:65) is not merely contingent, it results from their handle on extra-discursive 'alethic truth' (Bhaskar 1993). The nature of women is partly extra-discursive, though mediated through and in some respects affected by discourse. The harms and benefits often experienced by women from various sorts of social treatment are real, and independent of our identifying them as such, though such recognition will have effects on them.

Since the linguistic turn, all steps necessary to an explanatory critique have been declared misconceived, 'foundationalist', 'essentialist', and even, by implication, oppressive and harmful–a typical postmodern circular sleight of hand

that can leave opponents stunned. Firstly, the category of women is declared merely nominal, and the project of discovering what women are like is rejected. The distinction between 'sex' and 'gender', one of the achievements of second-wave feminism, was at the core of many explanatory critiques that tried to explain the systematic misrepresentation of women's liabilities and capacities. This distinction is rejected by many postmodern feminists. Secondly, the realist distinction between perceived and real interests is unequivocally rejected, and women's interests are defined in purely subjective and local terms. It is easy to see that these positions outlaw explanatory critiques, and in so doing I believe they seriously undermine feminist politics.

Identifying women

Early second-wave feminism had no trouble in identifying members of the category 'women', and neither do almost all activists against the oppression of women today. The sex-gender distinction assumed that *sexual* difference was real and relatively unaffected by cultural difference—part of the evolved nature of the human species—and in most cases bodily dimorphism made it clear who was a woman and who a man. *Gender,* on the other hand, was conceptualised as the local, current set of meanings attributed to sexual difference, and practices which express and give rise to those meanings. The French for gender, *'relations sociaux de sexe'* expresses this difference well. 'Women' is ambiguous. It may mean 'female human beings', which refers to sets of bodily features, or it may mean 'people positioned and treated as women', an overlapping but not identical group. The distinction between sex and gender seemed progressive insofar as it drove a wedge between femaleness and cultural womanhood. Its political significance was evident during the negotiations over the *Platform for Action* in 1995: some Catholic and Islamic countries that uphold very restricted roles for women tried to get all references to 'gender' expunged from the document and replaced by the word 'sex', that is, to naturalise gender so that the practices they defended might be presented as expressions of sexual difference, and therefore as non-oppressive.

Students will often say 'Sex is biological, gender is a social construction'. It is just this sort of formulation that has given rise to postmodern critiques, with the implication being that the biological underlies the social and is the truth of it; that biological essences are fixed, and social constructions are their filmy transient garments. For Barrett, who was once a materialist, the sex-gender distinction is part of the 'far-reaching influence and effects of the structure–culture and base–superstructure dichotomies' yet to be worked through (1997:119). Butler's *Gender Trouble* (1990) attempts this working through: she maintains that gender is not the meaning of sex, but sex the effect of *gender* which is ontologically prior in an ethereal, processual sort of way. Butler stresses that sex is itself a gendered category. We approach the newborn child with our gendered glasses on, we home in on its genitals which we view through these dichotomous spectacles, and we use drugs, knives and scalpels to produce the

fleshly distinctions we require, reducing a wonderful variety of human difference to the dualistic prison of 'girl' or 'boy'.

Butler sees gender as only materialised through performance, through 'doing' it, as symbolic interactionists put it. It is 'a corporeal style, an act, a strategy of cultural survival under duress' (1990:141). She makes no distinction between a 'metaphysics of substance' and ontology in general, and so slips into an idealism in which naming brings things into being. If the body is posited as prior to discourse, for her that very conception demonstrates that it is part of the order of discourse (Sandford 1999:24). Butler's later works, *Bodies that Matter* (1993) and 'Contingent Foundations' (1995), are less obviously idealist. Butler here admits the materiality of the body, but it remains formless, its only causal powers emanating from its discursive construction. Her political aim is to oppose all hard and fast identities, which must necessarily exclude. Like many postmodern feminists, she favours actions that disrupt boundaries, which upset and challenge the 'constitutive constructions' of discourse. As Glick points out, while Butler welcomes camp and queer parodies of 'natural' sex, because they reveal gender as an act, she cannot consistently support transgressive identity politics. All identity politics, even the transgressive sort, are implicitly normative, otherwise we would not know who counted as having the identity and what were appropriate or at least intelligible expressions of it. But such boundaries must always be excluding, and to Butler all exclusion is politically objectionable (Glick 2000). Butler's discursive reductionism can only lead to a very restricted politics, in which emancipation is merely 'an internal relationship within thought' (Bhaskar 1998:436; New 1998).

For Barrett, to compare the sex-gender distinction to the base-superstructure distinction serves as a *reductio ad absurdum* without any need for argument. Not at all. However undertheorised the base-superstructure distinction may be, it introduces a concept crucial to thinking through sex and gender: stratification. The level at which women are constructed as social persons emerges out of the level at which there are sexual differences between human beings. Sexual difference is real and does apply cross-culturally, as we would expect of human species characteristics. We can therefore identify female human beings, women, even though the meanings of femaleness are culturally variable. Femaleness is not an essence, but a set of family resemblances, and gendering practices stress some of these more than others in some times and places. Sexual difference is not as dichotomous as gendered societies would have it be, but to represent it as a 'continuum' is to deny the salience of evolution. Nor is the relationship between sex and gender an open one.

> When the constructed status of gender is theorised as radically independent of sex, gender itself becomes a free-floating artifice, with the consequence that *man* and *masculine* might just as easily signify a female body as a male one, and *woman* and *feminine* a male body as easily as a female one.
>
> (Butler 1990:10)

This is nonsense. The socio-cultural structures of gender ontologically presuppose the physiological structures of sexual difference. Gender is not and *cannot be* 'radically independent of sex'. Yet it is to some extent autonomous and the valuable discovery of second-wave feminism was precisely this insight, which allows us to investigate, discover and theorise the different forms gender takes, and use these findings in explanatory critiques of conservative reductions of gender to sex. The distinction between gender and sex means, as second-wave feminists believed, that gender is susceptible to and is a site of social change. But the political value of the sex-gender distinction depends on the critical realist understanding that we have different orders of generative mechanisms operating here, which together result in the actual forms of sexual identity and gender positioning in different cultural contexts.

Have women common interests?

Everyone knows, of course, that in a common-sense way we can identify members of the group of women. The postmodern position is that the group or category has only a nominal unity. Second-wave feminism has taken its own Western culture as the norm, and treated non-Western/Third World cultures as inferior Others, suppressing heterogeneity (Mohanty 1997). Mohanty even rejects the view that while women's conditions of life differ cross-culturally, they have common interests by virtue of being subordinate:

> The assumption of women as an already constituted, coherent group with identical interests and desires, regardless of class, ethnic or racial location […] implies a notion of gender or sexual difference or even patriarchy which can be applied universally or cross culturally (the context of analysis can be anything from kinship structures or the organisation of labour to media representations). (1997:94)

Here, the ideal of international solidarity between women is represented as both hypocritical and unattainable–women have no interests in common across cultures. What is odd about this argument is its unacknowledged tendency to spiral towards individualism. The standard for common interests is absurdly high: even women in one culture (if we were able to identify a single culture) who do have similar class, ethnic and racial positions would not be 'an already constituted, coherent group with identical interests or desires'. Such strict criteria will lead to smaller and smaller groups.

Real and effective political movements can bring together groups of people around a common platform without their needing to be 'coherent' or to have 'identical interests or desires'. In international meetings, such as the 1995 NGO forum in Beijing, women from many countries have both constructed and discovered common interests. In situations where differences in power and resources were less than in the real world and no one had decision-making power, they discovered, through dialogue and through the exchange of stories and ideas,

under what descriptions they were similar to women from other places, and made these reasons for solidarity. In one way or another, in all countries, women still lack full effective citizenship, reproductive control, control over their own bodies and sexuality, and equality in employment. Although gender relations take very different forms, it is true across cultures that in general women have less access to positions which generate beliefs and give rise to decisions, and so have less say in the formation and interpretation of their own cultures. The solidarity (as well as the conflict) between the 35,000 women at the NGO forum was not a case of postmodern groundless solidarity, but of the construction of collective identity on the basis of real communalities. This took place through the formation of relationships, formal and informal links, and alliances, and through an active process of mutual identification. This process is reminiscent of Collier's description of the cognitive paradigm of practical reasoning he claims is 'implicit' in Bhaskar's work:

> [Given that people unavoidably have values, the way to change those values for the better is by increasing knowledge, both descriptive (e.g. what it is like to be a forest-dweller turned out of one's home and livelihood by a rancher), and explanatory (e.g. how come ranchers have the motive and the power to turn the forest-dwellers out?).
>
> (Collier 1994:197)

However, it might be argued that the group of women who met in Beijing and in nearby Huiarou were self-selected. For one thing, they had the cultural and material resources to get to an international meeting, or the social capital to get sponsorship. And they already shared a common language. In Spivak's terms they were cultural dopes of the UN: 'The financialisation of the globe must be represented as the North embracing the South. Women are being used for the representation of this unity […] these conferences are global theatre' (1996:2). To examine the postmodern view that women have no common needs or interests, let us look instead at rape. It is a measure of how far feminism has moved from the certainties of the 1970s that not only is there a long-running fierce argument between defenders and enemies of pornography and the sex industry, but also, probably for the first time, the universal nature of rape has been questioned in a feminist publication.

Forced sex–grounds for solidarity?

Is it true of all the women of the world that they are potentially vulnerable to being hurt by rape? If so, all women have a common interest in changing institutions that increase the likelihood of rape–as long as a better alternative can be found. It might be thought that the statement 'All women may be hurt by rape' is tautologous, rather like the statement 'All humans may be hurt by assault'. If we substitute 'forced sex' for 'rape', the point becomes clearer. There are societies, it seems, where forced sex occurs but is not construed as rape. And there are societies where forced sex does not occur and is not considered a danger because it is impossible.

In her article '"It's only a penis": rape, feminism and difference', Helliwell (2000) describes the Gerai people in Indonesia among whom rape is unknown. She argues, rightly in my view, that the 'universality' of rape, 'because men can' (Brownmiller 1993), is a projection of the fears of Western women onto the entire world. The Gerai have very different views of sexual difference from those of Western science. They conceptualise male and female sexual organs as essentially similar (conical and wider at the top) but differently located. Sex between men and women is a blending of similar fluids between beings with a different orientation of life forces. According to Helliwell, genital difference is seen as less significant than what we would call gender difference, that is, whether you are a being who clears fields or one who selects and stores rice seeds. The penis is neither admired nor feared, but seen as vulnerable. When a man tried to get into a woman's bed in the night and told her to keep quiet, Helliwell saw this as a case of attempted rape and commiserated angrily, saying, 'He was trying to hurt you'. The 'victim', who had raised a hue and cry and chased him out of the window, looked at her pityingly and said, 'But how could he hurt me? It's only a penis.' His crime in her eyes had been to misread the signs in the relationship and to prematurely judge her as willing to have sex. Helliwell uses her experience with the Gerai to critique the sex-gender distinction, on the grounds that Western beliefs in the 'sexed' character of bodies are produced by specifically Western gendering and sexual regimes. She uses the different ways of conceptualising and ordering markers of sexual difference to deny that it has any extra-discursive reality that makes some accounts better than others. She also concludes, with more reason, that rape as we in the West know it is not a by-product of male bodies but of particular cultural understandings of sexual difference. However, there is nothing in her account to suggest that Gerai women would not be harmed by rape. Indeed, their level of outrage and horror may well be greater than that of most Western women because, if Helliwell is right, they have not been so systematically disempowered around sex.

In complete contrast to the Gerai, unprotected women among the Yanomami, a semi-nomadic people living in the Amazonian forest, are routinely subjected to forced sex, according to anthropologist Kenneth Good (1992) who married a Yanomami woman. Good's wife was raped by her brother-in-law when Good was away on a trip. Yarima did not want to have sex with her brother-in-law, and fought him. She screamed at him and her mother complained–but that was the end of it. The male Yanomami response to such happenings was to fight with other men over women, to 'club each other over the head and break their skulls open over it'. Still, it was an accepted fact that all women were sometimes subjected to forced sex:

> Jesus, when I thought about it in English–'he raped her'–the words really did it to me. In Yanomama it wasn't quite so bad, you got it in their context But in English? He raped her, he raped my poor, beautiful wife.
>
> (Good 1992:199)

Was this rape? The meanings of this act were not the same as they would have been in Western countries. And, if Good is to be believed, neither were the effects. During his next trip, Yarima was raped by many men. On his return she had begun to heal:

> She's more distant than she was before, she seems somehow wary. But not damaged permanently. By our standards she should be in a mental institution. A girl from New York who had been raped, strangled and mutilated like that might not be the same for the rest of her life. But here there's no stigma, no community scandal, and as far as I can see, no lasting psychological repercussions.
>
> (Good 1992:247)

But Yarima watches Good all the time to see if he will leave, laying her open to yet more mistreatment.

This example, which a postmodern referee took as a refutation of a realist notion of women's oppression, to my mind confirms that forced sex is inherently harmful whatever the cultural context, although its effects are certainly affected by understandings of it. If so, feminist explanatory critiques can in this respect at least have cross-cultural validity. Women cross-culturally do have both similar and common interests in opposing rape, although which institutions and practices make rape likely to happen, and which alternatives are feasible and desirable, will, to some extent, be relative to particular peoples and cultural contexts.

Conclusion

Critical realism can make a tremendous difference to feminism. Its understanding of both abstraction and the stratification of mechanisms can provide activists and NGOs with the intellectual tools necessary to conceptualise the sex-gender distinction in ways that are neither reductionist nor idealist, and to rebut the ludicrous actualist claim that we 'cannot know what women are' and its reactionary 'politics of undecidability'. Instead, we can use the distinction between the domains of the real, the empirical and the actual, and the recognition that causal powers may exist without their effects being realised in a particular context, to sort out the combined effects of oppressive structures of gender, class, ethnicity, age, and so on. For critical realism, real communalities between women, however narrow or wide, long or brief, are not to be assumed or imagined but discovered and explored as possible grounds for solidarity and common action. A critical realist understanding of explanatory critiques can sharpen the many condensed explanatory critiques implicit in feminist argument and encourage higher standards of evidence. Its understanding of stratification and emergence can cut through a lot of sterile dichotomous discussions about humanist versus anti-humanist conceptions of the self and subjectivity.

Then why is realism so unattractive to feminists to the extent that, in her return to realism, Donna Haraway had to deny what she was doing?

> My problem and 'our' problem is how to have simultaneously an account of radical historical contingency for all knowledge claims and knowing subjects, a critical practice for recognising our own 'semiotic technologies' for making meanings, and a no nonsense commitment to faithful accounts of a real world […] The approach I am recommending is not a version of realism, which has proved a rather poor way of engaging with the world's active agency.
>
> (Haraway 1991:187, 197)

Clearly, realists have a public relations problem on their hands. The feminist alliance with postmodernism in the critique of science and social science methodology, and the women's movement's attachment to empiricism and dislike of elitism, leaves us with ground to make up. How can we do it? In the real world of the academy, we need to look for and counteract any informal exclusionary practices discouraging women. Intellectually, we must give no ground to feminist postmodernism. While recognising the importance of some post-structuralist deconstructive work, and the interest in some of the questions feminist postmodernists have raised, reject its radical scepticism. Insist that realism is not elitist, since it is fallibilist. And, in particular, resist the temptation to collude with fashionable 'post-feminist' views that sexual abuse, rape, female genital mutilation and other sorts of harm to the person are culturally relative *in respect of whether they hurt* (they are in respect of how they hurt). The politics of undecidability extol a life on the fence:

> the difference between asserting that 'women are different from men' (implying we *know* what women are) and saying (in the same breath) 'Women are different. No they are not'–implying we do *not* know what they are […] the current period of tense co-existence between these two states is about living and thinking in a mode of *impossibility* sometimes referred to in other contexts as 'postmodern'.
>
> (Jardine 1997:80)

This is to abandon feminism, and with it any hope of academic underlabouring for the real struggles of women against always limiting, sometimes harsh, and sometimes cruel, structures of oppression.

Notes

1 At least in some circumstances, and at least for someone, usually women. But see New (2001) for a discussion of the mistreatment of men.

2 It can also be argued that while men's reproductive capacity can be exercised without physical, let alone emotional, connection with the resultant offspring, such disconnection is against the interests of men as well as children and women. If this is

true, further value conclusions follow about how parenting should be organised and what its relationship to other work should be.

3 See Harding (1991) *Whose Science? Whose Knowledge? Thinking from Women's Lives* for an influential version of the feminist critique of science. Harding's later work, for example, her article 'Comment on Hekman's "Truth and Method"' (1997), shows a degree of compromise with relativism brought about, in my view, by the limitations of Harding's earlier realism.

4 Luckily there are exceptions to this. For example, the study of violence against women.

5 And, arguably, beyond.

6 While denying the legitimacy of the move from 'is' to 'ought', Benhabib (1990:339) nevertheless here seems to recognise the evidential status of ontology in regard to ethics:

> What distinguishes 'modern' from 'premodern' versions of universalistic ethical theories is the assumption of the former that the moral community is coextensive with all beings capable of speech and action, and potentially with all of humanity. In this sense, communicative ethics sets up a model of moral conversation among members of a modern ethical community, *for whom the theological and ontological basis of the inequality between humans has been radically placed into question*.
>
> (*ibid.;* emphasis added)

7 I have written elsewhere about feminist standpoint theories, which claimed potential epistemological advantage for women on the grounds that oppressed groups have a truer perspective on some aspects of social relations, and less motivation to disguise or legitimise oppression (New 1998). While post-structuralist feminists welcome the view of knowledge as perspectival, they reject the idea that some perspectives provide a better view than others (Hekman 1997).

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4 Critical realism

The difference that it makes, in theory

José López

Introduction

As this volume tries to illustrate performatively, critical realism does make a difference, and it does so on a number of different levels and in a variety of different contexts. This is no less the case in the field of social theory, the field from which, and about which, I will be writing in this chapter. I have tried to crystallise in the title the crux of the argument that I will be advancing. It can be read, or at least that was my intention, in two ways. On the one hand, it can be taken to mean that critical realism does, in fact, make a difference in the realm of social theory. That is, that critical realism adds something to our understanding of how social theory works and how we should work with it. Thus, in the first part of this chapter I will very briefly draw out the implications for social theory which are contained in critical realism's claim for the regulatory function that meta-theory has for substantive theoretical development, as well as the general role that social theory plays in the process of explanation.

On the other hand, the title can also be read as suggesting that it is perhaps possible to identify a disjunction between theory and practice. That is, that some of the implications for social theory contained in critical realism exist only as potentialities that have yet to be actualised. In this context, I will argue that although critical realism acknowledges that the production of theory and knowledge is always a social production, it has had very little to say about the fundamental medium of exchange used in theoretical activity: language. I will suggest that due to the language-borne nature of the practice of social theory, it is crucial to develop an understanding of the specificity of the discursive and conceptual processes, the potentialities and constraints, that emerge at this level of theoretical practice. I will argue that although logical argumentation and empirical testing play a crucial role at this level, they do not exhaust the range of strategies that are deployed in practical theorising.

As a first step towards attempting to open up the field of discussion in this area, in the hope of developing a richer understanding of social theorising as a social and discursive practice, I will examine the role that metaphors play in social theorising. In all fairness, it must be said that critical realism has always acknowledged the importance of metaphors and analogies; however, rather

surprisingly, the conception of metaphorical activity that has most frequently been deployed, normally implicitly, is an atomistic one. One which is clearly at odds with the relational social ontology explicit in critical realism. I will argue that this problem, in part, can be overcome by locating metaphorical operations as social, and relational processes, rather than as individual endeavours. The import of this I hope to show is a richer conception of what it means to speak about social theorising as a social practice and an awareness of how the sociality of theoretical language contains both opportunities and limitations.

The difference that a realist ontology makes

The strength of Bhaskar's argument in *A Realist Theory of Science* (1975) lies in the distinction he makes between ontology and epistemology–the intransitive and transitive dimensions, respectively–and the implications that this distinction has for our understanding of scientific practice. First and foremost, Bhaskar argues that in order to make sense of experimental practice, and of scientific explanation in general, in the natural sciences, it must be acknowledged that reality is what it is, and continues to be so independently of the (transitive) theories or knowledges that we may have of it. As Latour has recently argued, '[n]atural objects are *naturally* recalcitrant; the last thing that one scientist will say about them is that they are fully masterable. On the contrary, they always resist and make a shambles of our pretensions to control' (2000:116). This recalcitrance would make no sense if we did not grant natural objects their ontological autonomy. However, accepting this should not lead us to conceptualise scientific practice in terms of some type of naïve realism where there is a simple correspondence between experimental situations and natural objects.

On the contrary, as Bhaskar (1975) quite decisively argued and ethnographies of laboratory situations have since corroborated (Latour 2000), experimental practice represents a specific type of work that is social in nature: work whose purpose is to make natural things representable in scientific language by creating a closure that rarely exists in the natural world. The latter is inherently an open system. Counter-intuitively, this is done by creating 'unnatural sequences of events in order to discover the mechanisms at work in natural ones' (Collier 1994:34).

Thus, the existence of causal mechanisms is posited through attempts to infer what the world must be like for an experimental event to take place. Then through experimentation, scientific practice attempts to empirically identify or find evidence for the posited causal mechanisms. Therefore, the logic of explanation in the sciences is not grounded in making claims about sequences of events in the natural world; rather, it is the search for transfactual causal mechanisms that may even be counter-phenomenal. Hence the positivist ideal of science as the search for invariant universal laws becomes untenable; 'knowledge of causal laws' should be 'understood as specifying the tendencies of mechanisms rather than as licensing the deductions of events' (Bhaskar 1986:31).

The importance of shifting from the conceptualisation of science as a means of searching for invariant universal laws to the elucidation of causal mechanisms, as tendencies, is crucial. It means, among other things, that outside the conditions of experimental closure different causal mechanisms will have a complex interaction through which some tendencies may be neutralised, others reinforced, and yet others modified. Consequently, it is important to distinguish between the empirical (those events which we are able to capture empirically), the actual (those events that do happen though they may go unnoticed), and the real, which includes the previous two as well as the realm of potential events that the interaction of different types of causal mechanisms may produce. Thus, not only are natural objects seen as being existentially autonomous, they are also seen as operating in a complexly structured reality; one that contains different levels of emergence.

The implications of Bhaskar's analysis are far more wide ranging and cannot be adequately dealt with here. However, what I wanted to do in the above was to draw the reader's attention, firstly, to the important function that asking ontological questions plays in the attempt to understand scientific practice, and, secondly, to the necessity of conceiving reality in terms of a complex ontology that does not centre exclusively around particular conjunctions of events. Events are the effect of reality, but not exhaustive of reality itself.

Subsequently, in the *Possibility of Naturalism,* Bhaskar (1979) was to argue that whereas meta-theoretical confusion created havoc in the philosophy of science, this was not the case with practising natural scientists as they were, at least implicitly, 'transcendental realist'.[1] However, the same could not be said about the social sciences in general and social theory in particular (Bhaskar 1979:20).[2] Thus, one of the fundamental ways in which realism has made a difference for social theory is in its attempt to inject some degree of meta-theoretical clarity into the very core of social theorising. The importance of this call to meta-theoretical clarity resides in the fact that whether we acknowledge them or not, whether they exist implicitly or explicitly in our theoretical discourses, meta-theoretical stances logically position (but, note, do not narrowly determine!) how we go about giving accounts of the social world, and how we test the validity of these accounts.

It must be stressed that under no circumstances should meta-theoretical arguments be confused with the development of substantive social theories (for example, social ontological arguments are not substantive concepts of social structure). Nor for that matter should the bid to establish meta-theoretical clarity be misconstrued as an attempt to create a foundation that secures the truth value of specific substantive social theories. Rather, as Margaret Archer quite rightly argues, '[i]n any field of study, the nature of what exists cannot be unrelated to how it is studied' (Archer 1995:6). Thus, meta-theoretical arguments, in the field of social theory, are aimed at establishing the mode of existence of those causal mechanisms that are social in nature (social ontology), how it is possible that we can have knowledge of them (epistemology), and what the techniques, procedures and processes are that we should deploy in order to produce said knowledge (methodology).

In this context, the point made by a variety of authors in the realist tradition is that thinking about social ontology is not just an esoteric metaphysical exercise; it has important consequences for the development of social theory. This, of course, is not to suggest that there is substantive agreement, for instance, in terms of how social ontologies are conceptualised. For a range of different positions see, among others, Archer (1995), Benton (1977), Bhaskar (1979), Lawson (1997), López and Potter (2001), Outhwaite (1987), Potter (1999), Sayer (1984), Stones (1996) and Woodiwiss (2001). However, without wishing to minimise the important differences that exist, it must be said that there is, nonetheless, broad agreement that social theory is concerned with attempting to represent the social world as having *sui generis* characteristics. In other words, the distinction between the transitive (knowledges and theories) and the intransitive holds for the social world as it does for the natural world.[3]

As a result, the social world is seen as something more than a mere aggregate of individuals. It has its own level of causality and specificity. In fact, critical realists argue that an understanding of the effectivity of the social world relies on making clear the distinction between individuals and the causal mechanisms that operate at the social level. As such, all the aforementioned authors, and critical realists in general, are committed to some notion of social structure as a key explanatory concept in understanding the *sui generis* nature of social life.

The difference that a realist epistemology makes

A number of authors have written in some detail about the epistemological implications that arise from holding a critical, or transcendental, realist position in the social sciences (see, for instance, Bhaskar 1979; Sayer 1984; Stones 1996; Potter 2000; Woodiwiss 2001). In general, it is recognised that explanation and empirical observation must be theory driven and model dependent. This must be the case because the ontological complexity of the social realm makes the social world opaque to us. Moreover, this position is also a recognition that our understanding of social phenomena is always conceptually mediated. There is no conceivable way of thinking of our connection with the social world otherwise. In this sense, doing social theory is no different from everyday action and the knowledges that it presupposes.

However, the specificity of theory driven, sociological explanation is that it is in principle an institutionally based attempt to articulate knowledges of the social world in a manner that is 'rigorous', 'coherent', 'self-conscious', 'purposive', 'self-reflexive' and empirically informed. It is also important to highlight that social theory is not, or should not be, concerned with presenting 'pictures' of the social world in which there is a point-by-point correspondence. The fact that events are seen as conjunctural configurations of a variety of different tendencies makes any straightforward representationlist paradigm impracticable. Furthermore, it may very well be the case, as Archer (1995) quite perspicuously reminded us, that the 'time' of the unfolding of social structures is not necessarily the time of the event, or of the individual actors who are implicated in an event. Consequently, social

theorising is an attempt to construct 'principles of visuality' that will allow us to 'grasp' or 'see' empirical evidence of the existence of social objects, and the manner of their functioning (Woodiwiss 2001). This 'seeing', however, will always, and inevitably, be partial, positioned and fallible.

The aforementioned epistemological position provides a particularly powerful methodological starting point from which one may attempt to develop theoretically informed explanatory accounts of the social world. However, this position alone is unable to address another feature of theoretical practice that critical realism should in principle be committed to examining. Bhaskar (1979:185–99) makes it abundantly clear that knowledge production should be conceptualised as a dynamic process through which individuals draw on socially produced materials (theories, facts, models, metaphors, and so on) as part of the process of developing models that subsequently may be empirically tested. Nevertheless, Bhaskar, it seems to me, has very little to say about the language-borne nature of these materials and the specificity of language use in the context of theoretical practice.

More often than not, Bhaskar, and critical realists in general, seem to imply through their practice that theoretical engagement has to be understood exclusively in terms of the logical, or illogical, architecture that underpins theoretical discourse,[4] and the empirical adequacy of substantive claims. These are indeed important dimensions of theoretical engagement, but they do not exhaust the ontological complexity that theoretical practice itself presupposes. Equally important are the discursive and narrative strategies that are deployed in theoretical discourse (see López 2001, forthcoming 2003).

Although I will not argue here for a substantive conception of social structure, or organisation, I accept the general critical realist notion that social phenomena should be understood relationally (Archer 1995; Bhaskar 1986).[5] Moreover, even though I have some doubts concerning the specific concept of emergence, the notion that particular configurations give rise to phenomena that are not reducible to their constituent parts is also one that I regard as important (López and Scott 2000:82–8). This, after all, is the crux of the ontological argument that critical realists make regarding the existence of social structures. If both of these positions are accepted, then it becomes germane to begin to ask what it means to speak about theoretical practice, and its language use, as a relational and emergent social practice.

On the one hand, it is possible to outline the location and interrelation of the different social sites without which social theory as a practice would not be possible. However, given its language-borne nature, theoretical practice cannot be understood merely in terms of this mapping in social space. The specificity of social theoretical practice is its attempt to conceptually articulate meaning systems capable of representing and explaining social phenomena. To do so, it draws on a variety of meaning systems. Thus, part of our understanding of the relational nature of theoretical practice has to include an account of the ways in which meaning circulates within and across domains of knowledge. In what remains of this chapter I will attempt to develop this type of perspective by looking at the role that metaphorical processes play in theoretical practice.

Metaphors as a source of innovation

A variety of writers in the realist tradition of the philosophy of science have drawn attention to the importance of models and metaphors[6] for scientific explanation.[7] This is due to the fact that most realists, notwithstanding numerous substantive disagreements, broadly agree on the following points: (i) mechanisms exist that are ontologically independent of our conceptions of them; and (ii) laws in science refer not to constant conjunctions of events but to trends or tendencies that may or may not manifest themselves empirically in open systems. As a result, realists have emphasised the need to explore how mechanisms, which are not readily empirically apprehended in constant conjunctions, can be modelled or 'visualised'.

The critical realist Lewis summarises the role that metaphors play in any explanatory enterprise as follows:

> Scientific metaphors are not merely linguistic ornaments that can be discarded in favour of literal description. On the contrary, metaphors are essential to the conception, development, and maintenance of scientific theories in a variety of ways: they provide the linguistic context in which the models that constitute the basis for scientific explanation are suggested and described; they supply new terms for the theoretical vocabulary, especially where there is a gap in the lexicon; and they direct scientists towards new avenues of inquiry, in particular by suggesting new hypothetical entities and mechanisms. Through metaphor scientists draw upon antecedently existing cognitive resources to provide both the model and the vocabulary in terms of which the unknown mechanisms […] governing observable behaviour can be conceived and so investigated. Metaphor thereby performs an indispensable cognitive role in scientific theorising.
>
> (1996:504–5)

To develop the example which Lewis uses–if a metaphorical relationship is established between an eye and a camera–the implication is that the knowledge that we might have of how a camera functions may be used in order to speculate on and conceptualise the mechanisms that might be at work in the eye. Thus the metaphor should not be understood merely in a descriptive sense. It creates a generative relationship which allows us to deploy a conceptual system to think about the functioning of the eye that would not be possible without the metaphor. Consequently, a metaphor 'allows us to speak of one thing in terms which are suggestive of another' (Lewis 1996:496); it uses 'the known to express the unknown' (1996:498).[8]

This account provides a general description of the role that metaphors play in scientific innovation; however, if we are to develop a critical understanding of the ways in which metaphors function in theoretical practice, then it is necessary to begin to unpack this process further. Maasen (1994), usefully, distinguishes between two types of metaphorical linkages: *transformation* and *transfer*. The first

type of metaphorical linkage refers to the process through which a metaphor establishes a relationship between a host domain and another phenomenological domain where the latter is used to generate new domain-specific concepts in the host domain. A well-known instance of this type of operation is the conceptualisation of the 'circulation' of wealth in terms of Harvey's conception of the circulation of blood (Foucault 1994:179). In the process of producing new concepts, meanings and theoretical strategies, this metaphorical operation severs the metaphor's initial connection with the domain from which it was drawn. The signifier 'circulation' becomes attached to the signifieds and theoretical strategies of the discourse of political economy and no longer to those of biology or physiology.

Similarly, a *transfer* sets up a relationship between a host domain and another phenomenological domain; however, it distinguishes itself from a *transformation* by its failure to produce new domain-specific concepts, meanings and theoretical strategies in the host domain. A classic exemplar of this type of linkage is Durkheim's organismic metaphor where social scientific analogues for 'organs', 'physiology', and so on are not developed (Lehmann 1993). To a large extent, in a *transformation* the metaphorical roots are superseded. This is not the case with a *transfer*. The epistemic content of the new concepts and theoretical strategies remain dependent on the semantic ties established between both domains. Consequently, networks of concepts will not be adequately integrated, leading to both conceptual and theoretical instability.[9]

It is worth highlighting that the distinction between a *transfer* and *transformation* is one of degree. All metaphorical operations begin as transfers and contain the possibility of becoming transformations. The extent to which this becomes the case depends in the first instance on the inherent opportunities contained in the metaphorical operation itself. Some metaphorical operations will be explanatory dead ends from the very beginning: while there is some potential in thinking about an eye in terms of a photographic camera, the same does not apply to thinking about the eye in terms of a car. A second dimension that impinges on the process is the extent to which active creative theoretical work manages to attach terms (signifiers) to new meanings (signifieds). As was noted above, this is a fundamental feature of theoretical practice. However, this is, also, a matter of degree, for as post-structuralists are surely right to point out, polysemy is an inescapable feature of all meaning systems. This last point, however, can be developed further by sketching the more general social and conceptual context in which the semantic links created by metaphors are established.

The social 'relationality' of metaphors

It is certainly not the case that only realists have been concerned with exploring the role of metaphors in scientific practice. Very broadly, the different approaches that have tackled this question can be clustered under three general headings: semantic, pragmatic and constructivist theories of metaphors (Maasen 1994:14–21). The semantic tradition (Hesse 1966; Black 1962) basically overlaps with the

realist philosophical tradition that was discussed in the previous section; pragmatic theories of metaphors are associated with the work of Davidson (1981) and Levin (1981); and constructivist approaches are found in the work of Rorty (1979), Knorr-Cetina (1981), Latour (1990) and Lenoir (1988). All three theoretical approaches stress the role that metaphors play in scientific innovation; however, they do so by focusing on different dimensions of this process (Maasen 1994:22).

Semantic theories, like realist theories, tend to stress the utility of metaphorical or analogical reasoning in the generation of new concepts for the purpose of addressing specific problems. They focus on the interactive semantic tension between the two domains, which are being linked via the metaphor, as the site for the generation of new concepts. Pragmatic theories, on the other hand, tend to emphasise the ways in which metaphors are processed, or normalised, by the existing disciplinary tools (Maasen 1994:22). Rather than merely emphasising the interaction between the host and metaphorical domain, they highlight how metaphors can serve to realign and reconfigure the tools already available within the host domain. Finally, constructivist accounts see the recourse to metaphors arising when problems within a discipline are not susceptible to a solution within the context of existing disciplinary tools. Metaphors are seen as solutions to problems in other disciplines that might provide successful solutions to problems in the host discipline (Maasen 1994). The most radical form of constructionism sees a fully-fledged metaphorical appropriation as producing an entirely new and incommensurable semantic and theoretical context.

Notwithstanding the substantive differences in the approaches discussed above, it is possible to extract some general points, which, I believe, provide important insights into the role that metaphors play in theoretical language. Semantic and realist perspectives draw our attention to how new concepts, and theoretical strategies, can be created through the semantic interaction of different fields of knowledge, or by making comparisons across phenomenological domains. The constructivist perspective highlights the discursive mediation of all knowledge production and the ways in which it is simultaneously embedded in local and wider 'networks' of practices (this emphasis is not absent in realist accounts, although it is often insufficiently thematised). As such, it gives us some sense of how metaphors can lead to the opening up of radically new ways of engaging with phenomena. Finally, the pragmatic perspective argues for the importance of understanding metaphorical operations, not only as processes through which it is possible to generate new meanings and concepts but also in terms of the internal theoretical realignment that metaphorical operations necessitate.

However, if we are to accept the commitment, implicit in critical realism, to represent metaphorical processes as being embedded in wider social relations of theoretical practice, then we need to question some of the assumptions contained in the aforementioned approaches. Firstly, all three approaches, at least implicitly, seem to be working with a notion of a 'discipline' as a relatively coherent and easily demarcated entity; I would argue that critical realists cannot be content with this nominalistic description. Instead, they should be concerned with describing the relations between the disciplines at the level of the discursive,

and non-discursive, connections that cut across disciplinary boundaries. That is, critical realists should be committed to mapping out the series of relations from which disciplines 'emerge'. This would open up an analytical space where it would be possible to examine the circulation of meanings and theoretical strategies across discursive fields. It would also allow critical realists to locate concepts and conceptual strategies in these spaces. This would provide another set of coordinates that critical realists could use in order to locate their own positioned practices.

This is not to suggest that we should abandon the notion of 'disciplinary boundaries' altogether. Instead, it is an attempt to argue for the importance of examining the phenomenon of the 'discipline' as the effect of the relations that are established with other fields of knowledge, conceptual systems, modalities of specifying objects, procedures for testing validity claims, and so on, and also, as Bourdieu argues, in terms of their location in 'social space' (Bourdieu 1988). This would allow realists to develop an understanding of how the same discursive networks are able to produce differing discursive events across disciplines. For example, evolutionary theory in biology and evolutionary theory in sociology are both interrelated at an 'archaeological' level (Foucault 1992), but they produce distinct discursive events. It is necessary to see exchange and transfer between disciplines as taking place across semi-permeable boundaries and not as unfolding between hermitic conceptual networks. The interpenetration of disciplines can then be understood, in part, in terms of the complex weaving together of mutually shared and related systems of statements that constitute different disciplinary and popular knowledges, ideologies, and so on. [10]

Secondly, with the possible exception of the constructivist approach, the aforementioned strategies for dealing with metaphors focus on the way in which subjects consciously and instrumentally deploy metaphorical strategies (see Knorr-Cetina 1981: Chapter 3). I believe that critical realists need to examine metaphorical processes as they are, embedded in larger conceptual networks, because on many occasions metaphorical strategies are being discursively deployed without the subject being aware of it. In a Durkheimian sense, these wider conceptual networks are of a *sui generis* variety; their (intransitive) existence is presupposed by theoretical practice. Of course, Lakoff and Johnson (1980) have argued that unacknowledged metaphorical processes are embedded in everyday communication and cognitive reasoning. However, it is precisely for this reason that it is crucial to understand the specificity of metaphorical practice as it unfolds in the discursive spaces where social theorising unfolds.

Maasen (1994:28) has argued that initial accounts which sought to explain the role that metaphors played in conceptual innovation represented the process in terms of the *transfer* or *transmission* of discrete packets of meaning across bounded disciplines (for example, from biology to sociology). This lead to an understanding of metaphorical strategies as arising in the context of the instrumental and intentional strategies of atomistic actors. This failed to capture the complex social, relational and cultural arrangements that were presupposed by these types of strategies. Maasen suggests that it is more fruitful to develop

a non-linear model of the transfer of metaphors. According to this notion, the continuous transfer of particular metaphors, or systems of metaphors, generates what Foucault has called a 'dispositif': a network of social, political, and scientific discourses, which–in Mitman's words–generate a 'general field of meaning'.
(1994:28)

By locating the use of metaphors in this broader social context it becomes possible to see them

> as *sites and media of exchange* both in the intrascientific and extrascientific domains. Such exchanges, which 'trade on' the capacity of metaphoric language to shift meaning, 'create an "ecological" network driven by the tension-fraught need or desire *both* to "fix" meanings and to disrupt, generate and transform them'.
> (Maasen 1994:29)

Thus, the semantic and theoretical potential of a particular metaphor, and its very possibility, has to be understood in terms of the relations of this wider social context.[11]

If the sociality of metaphors is recognised then it is no longer possible to see their efficacy only in terms of the problems perceived by subjects. They must be conceptualised in terms of the discursive (and non-discursive) organisation of the disciplines within which, and from which, subjects or social theorists are speaking–that is, as a socially positioned practice. This would allow us to explore the reasons why some metaphorical strategies are possible, but not others. In other words, it would highlight the extent to which the possible number, and the nature, of metaphorical strategies are intimately connected with the organisation of discursive spaces, and the networks of concepts they make possible. Moreover, metaphors would not be conceived narrowly and voluntaristically, but only as possible solutions to determinable problems, or sources of conceptual innovation (Knorr-Cetina 1981); they would also been seen as framing the very nature of some of the problems within scientific discourse.

Conclusion

To summarise, if one begins to see disciplines as being traversed and constituted by connections with other domains, it becomes clear that, as social theorists, we are drawing on already existing conceptual networks. These networks, however, should not be seen as rigidly determining what may and may not be said. They should not be seen as containing the concepts themselves; rather, they should be seen as providing the basis for the production of concepts and the exchange of meaning. The networks, as universes of possibilities, certainly contain rules of exclusion, but they also contain myriad potentialities for the development of concepts and theoretical strategies. Moreover, these networks, or systems of meaning exchange, should not be seen as somehow standing outside, or hovering over, social reality. Insofar as disciplines are constituted by both discursive and

non-discursive practices, the conceptual networks that make social theory possible are part of the (intransitive) reality that social theory attempts to represent. It is their *sui generis* (intransitive) nature, the fact that they are a precondition for theoretical practice, that makes it possible to examine conceptual development as a relatively autonomous process.

If we take metaphorical operations as an important instance of theoretical practice, then it is clear that the selection of different metaphors, but also the process through which metaphors are 'processed', is dependent on constraints and potentialities that are, in part, discursive in nature. Some metaphors are not possible; other metaphors, while possible, will be failed metaphors.

Metaphorical processes introduce a variety of tensions, incompatibilities and desiderata. Some are conceptual, others methodological, some logical and others political. These tensions require the active practice of subjects. Sociologists and social theorists deploy a number of discursive processes, some conscious but others not, in order to overcome these tensions. However, the exigencies themselves may be entirely insurmountable. Thus, the failure to overcome the discursive exigencies associated with metaphorical functions can be ascribed to specific subjects (theorists), extra-theoretical factors, the systems of statements and conceptual networks that the metaphor produces, or to a combination of all three. It is important that social theorists, as socially positioned actors, learn to distinguish between these types of influences as well as identify their interrelationship.

The intransitive sociality of the meaning systems that social theory instantiates makes them as recalcitrant as any causal mechanism in the natural world. If we are to be 'reflexive' about our theoretical practice, we cannot be content with merely reflecting on how we as 'social beings' are positioned. We must also include an understanding of the relationality of language and the meaning systems that we deploy in our theoretical practice. After all, these are among our most important tools. We should not, like too many postmodernists, avoid these questions by celebrating the opacity of language or the reign of the 'floating signifier'. Equally, we should not remain complacent, acting as if language were a transparent medium of theoretical communication. This means that we have to be much more vigilant, and suspicious, of the different discursive and narrative strategies that we deploy. Metaphors contain important opportunities for theoretical and conceptual development, but they also contain traps and dead ends. It is incumbent upon us to harness their potential and avoid their pitfalls.

In principle, critical, or transcendental, realists are well positioned to develop a theoretical practice that is sensitive to the exigencies of language. However, it is too often the case that our fallible theories and explanations about the social world are conceptualised as belonging exclusively to the transitive domain. In part, this is a result of critical realism's own success in making a strong distinction between ontology and epistemology in the natural sciences. The natural world is what it is independently of our knowledge of it! It is extremely useful to contrast the intransitive nature of the natural world with the transitive nature of our socially articulated knowledge of it. However, this contrast may be devastating if we are careless when translating it to the social world. We run the risk of thinking about

social theory, and the knowledges that it makes possible, as belonging exclusively to the transitive domain. Clearly this is not the case. The production of knowledge about the social world is ultimately fallible, hence transitive; but it relies on the intransitivity, and sociality, of language as a medium of theoretical and conceptual communication.

Notes

1 The extent to which this applies to contemporary theories of quantum mechanics, however, is open to question. See Christopher Norris (2001) for a critique from a critical realist perspective of the anti-realism of the scientists working in this field.

2 One of the advantages of Bhaskar's redescription of natural sciences is that it makes it possible to argue for continuity between explanation in the natural and the social sciences. However, in *The Possibility of Naturalism,* Bhaskar (1979) introduces a number of caveats regarding the nature of this continuity. This has lead Barnes (2000:32), quite rightly in my opinion, to argue that in this way Bhaskar undermines his own argument for naturalism. On this point, see also Benton (1981) and Woodiwiss (2001).

3 In the article cited above, Latour (2000) quite cogently argues for an understanding of the natural sciences,that has important parallels with the position sketched out by Bhaskar. Moreover, Latour also adds that sociology should model itself along the lines of the natural sciences, and recognise the 'thingness' of objects of explanation in the social world. However, he maintains that in order to do so we must focus on individuals, and do away with fictions such as social structure. Thus, although he has a complex ontology with respect to the natural world, he does not adequately 'translate' this ontological conception to the field of sociology. See López and Scott (2000) for an account of social structure that tries to undermine the facile dismissal of conceptions of social structure in social theory

4 This seems to be the implication that arises from Archer's analysis of culture, and the way in which logical relations condition the choices that agents (whether individual or collective) make; see also Archer (1995).

5 See Hodgkiss (2001) for a discussion of some of the problems that arise from the ambiguity surrounding the use of the notion of relationality in the work of critical realists. For a broader account of the concept of relational structure see López and Scott (2000: Chapter 4).

6 The specialised literature on metaphors has grown at an astonishing rate. For instance, two successive, though not fully comprehensive, bibliographies (Noppen *et al.:* 1985; Noppen and Hols 1990) contain over 6,000 entries. Noppen has referred to this growing interest in metaphors as an intellectual 'metaphormania' (Maasen 1994:11). Many of the texts make important distinctions between 'metaphors, images, analogies, models and systems of thought' (Maasen 1994:11). In this chapter, however, I am not concerned with hair-splitting distinctions or highly specialised debates regarding the use of the aforementioned terms. Rather, following Maasen *et al.* (1994), I maintain that many of the important implications of the functioning of metaphors in theory may be examined without recourse to a specialist vocabulary. Consequently, I use metaphor, model and analogy almost interchangeably.

7 See, for instance, Bhaskar (1975), Boyd (1993), Harré (1970), Harré and Madden (1975), Harré and Martin-Soskice (1982), Hesse (1966) and Lewis (1996).

8 Thus, as Nietzsche maintained, 'the essential feature of our thought is fitting new materials into old schemas […] making equal what is new' (cited in Knorr-Cetina 1981:49).

9 Frequently, when theorists refer to a metaphor pejoratively, it is this situation that they normally have in mind.

10 The selectivity towards specific metaphors might then be understood both discursively and non-discursively. However, this is certainly not the same as equating metaphors to ideology. For instance, it has been pointed out that Darwinian selectionist theory was used to legitimise European colonialism, and social inequality. However, recent historical work suggests that a crude causal connection between metaphors and ideologies obscures more than it reveals. See, for instance, Hejl (1994) and La Vergata (1994) on the metaphor of 'organism', and Mitchell (1994) on the metaphor of the 'superorganism'. See also Bannister (1979), Kelly (1981) and Morgan (1994), where the commonsensical connection between Darwinism and economic theory is persuasively critiqued.

11 In this context it is worth pointing out that the study of metaphors can also provide important coordinates for the study of cultural change in diverse yet related social domains (Bono 1990).

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5 Critical realism and scientific method in Chomsky's linguistics

Peter E. Jones

Introduction[1]

The publication of Noam Chomsky's (2000) essays on language and mind provides a suitable occasion on which to reconsider the critical realist reception of Chomskyan theory. Chomsky's 'linguistic nativism' (Sampson 1999), with its avowedly Cartesian orientation (cf. Chomsky 1966), has always tended to polarise scientific and philosophical opinion. In some quarters the very idea of innate linguistic and other mental faculties is dismissed offhand as idealist and/or unscientific, while in others it is celebrated as an important scientific contribution (not to say revolution).

The anti-Chomskyan camp is a rather motley crew, bringing together positivist philosophers such as Quine and Putnam (see the discussion in Chomsky 2000); non-Chomskyan linguists such as Harris (e.g. 1980), Lakoff (e.g. Lakoff and Johnson 1999), Moore and Carling (1982), and Sampson (1999);[2] and Marxists (e.g. Timpanaro 1980). The pro-Chomskyans are also many and various but, rather surprisingly, include critical realists among their number, notably Andrew Collier (1994) and Trevor Pateman (1987), whose evaluation of Chomskyan theory has been unequivocally positive.

Both Collier's and Pateman's endorsements are surprising since, in my view, they are wholly misconceived. From the standpoint of critical realism, Chomsky is not a scientific realist. His linguistics is not science but, rather, a perfect example of what can happen if a Humean conception of causality, an unbridled epistemic fallacy, and a dogmatic reductionism based on a 'strong essentialism' (Sayer 1997) are all rolled up into one and set loose on the world. In short, Chomsky's linguistics is the kind of 'pseudo-science' (Collier 1994:18) that critical realism can help to debunk. The purpose of this chapter, then, is to decouple critical realism from Chomsky, while giving nothing to positivism, and to offer a glimpse of the direction a linguistics informed by critical realism might take.

The remainder of the chapter is structured in the following way: the second section sets out those aspects of Chomsky's approach to the study of language and mind which are relevant to the present work; the third section provides a brief critical survey of critical realist responses to Chomsky; the forth section

offers a critical realist critique of the foundational assumptions and orientation of Chomskyan linguistics; and, finally, the fifth section suggests some implications for linguistics of the critical realist critique of Chomsky.

Chomsky's 'linguistic nativism'

In presenting his case, Chomsky often employs a rather effective expository and rhetorical device which consists in imagining how a super-intelligent extra-terrestrial being would go about the study of human language. Unencumbered by the parochial earthbound attitudes, ideological distortions and downright stupidity that humans (for example, Chomsky's opponents) are prone to, Chomsky's Martian very quickly gets to the bottom of things, in good Chomskyan fashion, of course. The super-organism assumes that language is a biological phenomenon to be approached with natural scientific methods, (also known as 'the methods of rational inquiry' (Chomsky 1988:41),. From certain suitably idealised facts about a speaker's intuitive comprehension of grammaticality, it postulates a system of abstract grammatical laws housed within the human brain. On the basis of certain suitably idealised facts about the acquisition of this system, specifically the impossibility of learning it by induction from observable evidence, an innate faculty called 'Universal Grammar' (UG) is postulated to explain linguistic capacity.

UG is a 'mental organ' whose 'growth' into the particular 'grammars' possessed by particular individuals is triggered by environmental stimuli (that is, linguistic and social interaction). The 'language' or 'grammar' grown in the individual brain is, therefore, quite distinct from 'language' in the sense of the meaningful vocal, gestural or written signs that we encounter all around us. Chomsky's exclusive object of theoretical inquiry is language' as understood in the former sense, or 'I-language', a term 'chosen to indicate that this conception of language is *internal, individual,* and *intensional*' (Chomsky 2000:26; emphasis added). The 'I-language', then, is at the core of what Chomskyans refer to as linguistic 'competence', while the actual production by speakers of utterances in real-life situations is known as 'performance', 'performance' being the result of the complex interaction of many mechanisms, including the 'I-language' system.

If this general perspective on language is surprising, then, to coin a phrase, 'you ain't seen nothin' yet'. Every sphere of human mental activity, when subjected to 'rational methods of inquiry', turns out to require its own dedicated biological substratum that makes certain types of computational operation accessible, while denying access to those which 'lie beyond the reach of our minds, structured and organised as they are' (Chomsky 1979:230). Grammatical *form,* as we have seen, is the province of one such organ. Semantic or conceptual *content* is the preserve of another: '[t]here is, it seems rather clear, a rich conceptual structure determined by the initial state of the language faculty […] waiting to be awakened by experience' (Chomsky 2000:64). Meanings and concepts are not *learned,* rather

> [t]he *a priori* framework of human thought, within which language is acquired, provides necessary connections among concepts, reflected in connections of meaning among words and, more broadly, among expressions involving those words.
>
> (Chomsky 2000:62–3)

To those who cannot countenance this, Chomsky responds as follows:

> Many have found such conclusions completely unacceptable, even absurd; the idea that there is something like an array of innate concepts and that these are to a large degree merely 'labeled' in language acquisition–as the empirical evidence suggests–certainly departs radically from many common assumptions.
>
> (Chomsky 2000:65)

Indeed, the same situation applies to 'technical terms of science and mathematics' (Chomsky 2000:65). These express those innate 'aspects of the mind' that 'enter into naturalistic inquiry' and which he calls 'the science-forming faculty' (or SFF),[3] which, naturally, permits only biologically 'accessible' theories. Innate mental organs are also active in literary and musical appreciation (Chomsky 1980:252) and in the ethical sphere (Chomsky 1988:153).

Critical realist reception of Chomskyan theory

To date, Chomsky's nativism has been well received in critical realist circles. I believe this is because critical realists have taken at face value Chomsky's seemingly realist stance in defence of the above ideas from positivist attacks. The relevant ingredients of Chomsky's apparent realism are:

1 an insistence on the (biological) reality of his postulated mechanisms; and
2 his analysis of actual sentences as the result of complex interactions between independent principles or generative mechanisms.

Thus, Keat and Urry (1975)–the first, to my knowledge, to offer a positive realist evaluation of Chomsky's views–argue that 'Chomsky's rationalism requires the adoption of a realist view of science' (1975:128–9) since in his positing of 'complex, and often innate, mental structures in humans to explain their acquisition of language' (1975:128) he 'rejects any attempt to eliminate such mentalistic, theoretical terms, which regards them as not genuinely referring to existent items' (1975:129). This is ingredient (1).

Furthermore, they claim that 'the study of language […] based on Chomskyan or similar principles' involves the 'explanation of the possible "appearances" of language (grammatical sentences) by its "essence" or "reality" (innate linguistic principles)'. (1975:195). This is ingredient (2).

The most significant contributor to the critical realist case for Chomsky is Pateman (1987). While saying nothing about Chomsky's overt philosophical rationale, he feels able to claim that there are 'no metascientific principles against an innate Language Acquisition Device' (1987:8). Pateman's strategy is to 'assume the truth of the nativist claims' (1987:81) and build on them. Although he informs us that this 'does not commit me to assuming the truth of any of the claims Chomsky has made as a linguist about the form of grammars' (1987:81), he nonetheless recognises that 'the exercise would be purely academic if I did not believe that some parts of the nativist doctrine were plausible', to which he adds: 'I do believe that' (1987:82).[4]

Pateman offers 'a defence of Chomsky's practice of science against the attacks of positivism on the one hand, and hermeneutically oriented philosophers, on the other', arguing that Chomsky's response to Quine's 'epistemological scepticism about the knowability of such rules [which guide behaviour] appeals to philosophical realism in both its ontological and epistemological senses' (1987:111). This is ingredient (1).

Pateman values Chomsky's conception of 'the heterogeneity of linguistic reality, and the multiple causation of linguistic actuality (speech output and intuitions)', which is 'not only correct, but characteristic of a realist approach in ontology' (1987:103–4). This is ingredient (2). Pateman also develops other arguments in support of Chomsky's position, one of which will be discussed below (see the fourth section).

Andrew Collier (1994), accepting quite uncritically Pateman's views, supplies a ringing endorsement of the realist credentials of Chomskyan theory, thereby failing signally to heed his own advice about 'attacking the (overt or covert) philosophical premisses of an existing theory' (1994:208). He does point out, however, that

> [p]hilosophical criticisms of Freud or Chomsky from rival theories in their respective fields may have been refuted using critical realist arguments; it does not follow that these theories are true, or the best theories in their fields.
>
> (Collier 1994:208)

All the same, his enthusiasm for Chomsky's theory is quite clear:

> While critical realism has no unique or unbreakable relationship with any substantive human-scientific theory, it has, I think, a fairly obvious natural affinity with Chomsky's theories, which is reflected even in the terminology both approaches use.
>
> (Collier 1994:209)

Thus, Collier's advocacy of Chomskyan linguistics comes down to support for ingredients (1) and (2):

> For critical realism, science discovers generative mechanisms underlying and explaining the phenomena. Chomsky describes his work as 'generative grammar' and aims to discover 'underlying mechanisms' of speech. Of course, Chomsky's early work predates Bhaskar's, and has perhaps influenced the critical realist terminology. But the agreement is not merely verbal. Chomskyan linguists take speakers' intuitions as their data to be explained, exemplifying the 'hermeneutic moment' that critical realism leads us to expect in every human science; and they then *explain* those data in terms of mechanisms that are no mere 'constructs' from the data, but transphenomenal causes of them, opaque to the speakers themselves–just what critical realism says a human science should do.
>
> (Collier 1994:209)

The critical realists' support for Chomsky is, however, misplaced. It seems that they have taken his 'realist' stance at face value and that this has blinded them to the deeply anti-realist implications of his linguistic views. The lesson from this is that realist philosophers must be concerned not merely or not so much with the *form* of arguments used in support of theories as with the *content* of the theories argued for. In Chomsky's case, what is important is not that his arguments conform to realist standards but that what he is arguing for is impossible on realist grounds. It is wrong, then, to endorse or reject theories on the basis of how the arguments in favour of them are constructed. What matters is *what is being proposed*[5]

Critical realism versus Chomsky

How should critical realists respond to Chomskyan nativism? One way involves 'attacking the (overt or covert) philosophical premisses of an existing theory', as Collier (1994:208) advises. Because Chomsky, for philosophical validation, openly appeals to Platonic and Cartesian doctrines of innate ideas and to the epistemological positions of rationalist and sceptical philosophers, notably Kant and Hume, it would be natural to begin with a direct assault on these philosophies and follow up with an exploration of their influence on his linguistic theory. For reasons of space, however, I will proceed slightly differently, starting off from Chomsky's 'methods of rational inquiry' (Chomsky 1988:41) in linguistics and moving towards the relevant (overt and covert) philosophical premisses.

The scientific procedure adopted by Chomsky's Martian, as outlined above, gives rise to a number of causes for immediate philosophical concern, to do with the following:

1. the conceptualisation of the *object* of scientific investigation, and specifically, the direct *reduction* of linguistic phenomena to biological phenomena;
2. what counts as *evidence* for the theoretical entities in his putative explanatory account; and
3. the *status* of these entities and, specifically, whether they are intended to refer to real mechanisms.

Let us deal with each in turn.

The object

Why study language as if it were a physical organ of the body? Chomsky's response is simple: why should it be studied differently? The very idea that mental and physical phenomena should be treated separately he attributes to 'the grip of empiricist doctrine' (Chomsky 1976:12), which can accept the development of physical organs of the body as a genetically determined biological process while seeing mental phenomena as a result of a learning process. Such views result in

> what might be called 'methodological dualism', the view that we must abandon scientific rationality when we study humans 'above the neck' (metaphorically speaking), becoming mystics in this unique domain, imposing arbitrary stipulations and *a priori* demands of a sort that would never be contemplated in the sciences, or in other ways departing from normal canons of inquiry.
>
> (Chomsky 2000:76)

The mental-physical dualism assumed by empiricism is therefore a 'traditional myth' that, like religious dogma, constitutes 'an insurmountable barrier to fruitful enquiry' (1976:12).[6] By contrast, Chomsky (2000:76) calls his own approach 'methodological naturalism', an approach that 'investigates mental aspects of the world as we do any others, seeking to construct intelligible explanatory theories, with the hope of eventual integration with the "core" natural sciences'.

One can agree that linguists should observe the same standards of scientific rationality as biologists but disagree that this is achievable by *assuming* that linguistic (and all other mental) phenomena *are* biological mechanisms. Such a move runs counter to the realist principle that 'it is the nature of the object that determines the form of its possible science' (Bhaskar 1979:3). Chomsky's 'methodological naturalism' isessentially a version of 'central state materialism' (CSM, or sometimes simply 'materialism'), a form of reductionism comprehensively demolished by Bhaskar (1979). The reductionism of CSM resides in its attempt 'to achieve a metaphysical economy by identifying those inner states responsible for outward behaviour with the physico-chemical workings of the brain, or more fully central nervous system' (Bhaskar 1979:125). Bhaskar argues that CSM offers 'a metaphysically untenable position' and 'faces difficulties of *analysis* and in sustaining adequate concepts of *causality* and of social *interaction'* (1979:129), as a result of which it 'reduces to epiphenomenalism, parallelism and a pre-established harmony of monads'[7] (Bhaskar 1979:129).

The philosophical significance of Chomsky's dogmatic reductionism can be seen clearly in its overall effect on the human sciences. It results in the disappearance (or extreme marginalisation) of social, cultural and historical processes as explanatory factors in human affairs, in stark contrast with the

'critical naturalism' of Bhaskar which sees society as governed by laws that 'operate at a multiplicity of emergent strata, rooted in but irreducible to natural strata' (Collier 1994:160–1). On the Chomskyan position, the status of the social as an independent ontological stratum becomes problematic, and, in fact, Chomsky makes no secret of his scepticism about the very possibility of a social science (Chomsky 1979:56).[8] Thus, as is typical of CSM, when the social stratum is collapsed into the biological we are left with 'individualism–that other reductionist position in the philosophy of the human sciences' and, underneath individualism, 'epistemological solipsism and idealism', which 'appear as conditions of the plausibility of materialism' (Bhaskar 1979:134). Chomsky's nativism, then, retains *this content*–that is, the individualism and idealism of the philosophical traditions he draws on–in the *form* of modern scientific discourse; it is not so much a *confirmation* (as he would argue) of rationalism as an *application* of it. The unworldliness of ideas and reason, the ahistorical character of morality, the primacy of the individual over the social–in short, the mind as a humanly uncontrollable *given:* all of this is preserved. This kind of biological reductionism is a form of 'strong essentialism', as identified and discussed in Sayer (1997), which

> assumes a one-to-one correspondence between causal powers (including essences), and behaviour, and treats social phenomena as reducible without residue to a biological substratum. It therefore shifts everything onto the nature side of the society/nature distinction and interprets our social being as purely animal-like.
>
> (Sayer 1997:476)

Evidence

The main evidence for nativism is the 'poverty of the stimulus'–'the enormous gap between what we know and the evidence on the basis of which we know it' (Chomsky 2000:65). The contrast between the rich specificity of the knowledge claimed to be manifest in linguistic competence and the accessible evidential base motivates dedicated innate principles that 'permit the organism to transcend experience, reaching a high level of complexity that does not reflect the limited and degenerate environment' (Chomsky 1980:340).

This argument is known in traditional philosophical language as the problem of induction and is particularly associated with Hume. Hume argued that the framing of general scientific laws in terms of necessary causal links between phenomena cannot be justified from the evidence of our senses, which led him to 'the disastrous conclusion that from experience and observation nothing is to be learnt' (Russell 1991:645), and from there to a denial of the possibility of rational belief *tout court*. Causation, on the Humean account, can only mean constant or repeated conjunction of events as confirmed by empirical evidence, since 'any other definition of cause had to include a non-empirical element, and therefore an element which could not be empirically justified' (Collier 1994:59). In other

words, 'empirical evidence'–understood to mean *sense data*–only gives evidence of one event following another in time: the inference from this *temporal conjunction* of events to a *causal relation* between them must therefore involve a 'non-empirical element'. The question which divides philosophers (and philosophies) is: what is the nature of this 'non-empirical element? Does it belong to the real world, or is it a product of our minds?

Kant's solution, in its various guises, essentially takes the latter position and, consequently, declares reality ('things-in-themselves') to be unknowable in principle. This solution also implies a particular relationship between ontological and epistemological dimensions: a view of how we *learn* of things–Thus, if what we know about the wrorld cannot be accounted for in terms of a process of induction from sese data, then this knowledge cannot correspond to anything real.determines what things we think are *real.* This is a version of Bhaskar's epistemic fallacy: 'the view that statements about being can be reduced to or analysed in terms of statements about knowledge' (quoted in Collier 1994:76).

This fallacy is at work in all forms of Kantianism. For example, the form that Bhaskar refers to as 'anti-deductivism' (in Collier 1994:60)[9] is able to recognise 'that science in fact sets up explanatory structures which are not reducible to Humean successions' but considers these structures 'part of the social practice of science rather than as natural structures discovered by that practice' (Collier 1994:60). Thus, 'the Humean conception of *the world* (as "the empirical world") is not challenged; and just as for Kant, structures are supplied by us' (Collier 1994:60–1). Chomsky's nativism is a variation on this theme. The child learning language is in the same position as the Humean scientist: the 'deep and abstract' nature of the grammatical knowledge to be acquired by the child cannot be empirically justified from the 'degenerate quality and narrowly limited extent of the available data' (Chomsky 1965:58), which 'leaves little hope that much of the structure of the language can be learned by an organism initially uninformed as to its general character' (Chomsky 1965:58). This information–that is, the 'explanatory structures' for language–is 'supplied by us', but by our *biology* rather than the 'social practice of science'.

Chomsky's extension of such 'explanatory structures' to all other spheres of mental activity is licensed by the same epistemically fallacious Humean argument. Even what one might call, at a stretch, 'technical concepts' such as *carburettor* or *bureaucrat* must be innate since they 'pose the familiar problem of poverty of the stimulus if we attend carefully to the enormous gap between what we know and the evidence on the basis of which we know it' (Chomsky 2000:65). Chomsky adds, quite correctly: '[a]ll of this is much in accord with traditional rationalist conceptions and even, in some respects, the so-called "empiricist" thought of James Harris, David Hume, and others' (Chomsky 2000:64). What we call 'concepts' and 'knowledge' are, therefore, essentially biological matter, 'grown' according to the brain's innately determined blueprints.

By contrast, the realist critique of Hume means seeing the 'non-empirical element' as real, that is, as a really existing property, mechanism or law of the real world external to the thinking mind, contrary to Kant. Thus, realist philosophy

> must reject two presuppositions which were central to Kant's own philosophical project, *viz*. that in any enquiry of the form 'what must be the case for Ø to be possible?' the conclusion, X, would be a fact about us and that Ø must invariably stand for some universal operation of mind. That is toÄ say, it must reject the idealist and individualist cast into which Kant pressed his own inquiries.
>
> (Bhaskar in Collier 1994:24)

This also means that the epistemological assumptions of Hume and Kant (and Chomsky) must be rejected: theoretical knowledge can be true although it does not arise through induction from observable events. To summarise,

> Bhaskar's philosophy can therefore dispense with the unknowable 'noumena' or things-in-themselves which haunt Kant's philosophy. However, it does not dispense with them in the same way as Kant's idealist successors did–by denying that there is a world independent of the knowledge minds may have of it. The nature of the *work* we must do in order to find out about the world shows us both that the world is not transparent to us but needs to be discovered, and that it can be made to yield up its secrets.
>
> (Collier 1994:22)

This critical realist position, ably expressed above by Collier, is completely at odds with Chomsky's view of the existence and workings of his science-forming faculty (SFF). Consequently, Pateman's (1987) robust defence of Chomsky's poverty of the stimulus argument looks all the more strange. Pateman correctly shows that the 'underdetermination' of theories by empirical evidence (understood *à la* Hume) is the predicament of all science, not just linguistics. Chomsky, he argues, 'was led to his own nativist account of language development in part because he *appreciated* the import of underdetermination arguments advanced by Goodman' (Pateman 1987:112). He explains that Chomskyan grammars–the individual, biological, mental entities developed within the individual organism–are equally 'underdetermined by the data' and that they are possible 'because the human organism has an innate endowment–universal grammar, a Language Acquisition Device, which "meets the data half-way"' (1987:112). Thus, Pateman ends up by endorsing Chomsky's Kantian position.

What has gone wrong here? The significant point, missed by Pateman, is not that Chomsky 'appreciated the import of underdetermination arguments' but that he adopted a Humean view of their import. Let us agree that theories are underdetermined by data (in the relevant sense): *we don't conclude from this that theories are innate!* The theoretical abstractions of the scientist, to be sure, are not the result of induction from sense data (although induction does form part of the process of scientific thinking) but they are, nonetheless, worked up–worked *out*–from available data. This is genuinely creative, theoretical labour: *new knowledge* of real mechanisms and laws is produced, and new aspects of reality are *discovered*.[10] Pateman fails to notice that Chomsky does not share this realist view of science.

What critical realists see as the *results* of the process of discovery, Chomsky takes to be a manifestation of the *initial, a priori* predisposition of the SFF. It is precisely this 'Humean' argument that Pateman is advancing in the case of language: grammatical knowledge is underdetermined by the data and therefore must be innately specified (so as to 'meet the data half-way').

The epistemological implications of Chomksy's view of knowledge are worth pursuing in a little more detail. According to this view, 'knowledge' is not really knowledge as such since it is not about anything;[11] it expresses *our* nature, not the world's, since it is a fact about how our brain allows us to apprehend the world and implies nothing about what the world is really like (or even if it exists).[12] If the structure of the brain itself determines what we can know, then necessarily there must be 'sharp limits on attainable knowledge' (Chomsky 1979:64), whereby some problems remain forever 'mysteries' that we are innately unequipped to solve (Chomsky 2000:83).[13]

And yet Chomsky argues that *true knowledge* would be possible if biologically accessible concepts and theories happened to converge or intersect with properties of reality, although of course 'there is no particular biological reason why such an intersection should exist' (Chomsky 1979:66). Nevertheless, Chomsky firmly believes that such incredible intersections do happen (and that we can know when they do): '[t]he successful natural sciences, then, fall within the intersection of the scope of SFF and the nature of the world' (Chomksy 2000:83). This intersection 'is a chance product of human nature' (2000:83), 'a remarkable historical accident resulting from chance convergence of biological properties of the human mind with some aspect of the real world' (Chomsky 1980:251). True knowledge depends on a 'kind of biological miracle' (Chomsky 1979:66).

This position, then, is essentially a 'modernised' variant of

> the old seventeenth-century theory of parallelism, according to which mind never intervenes in the physical world, but its history is, as it happens, so arranged and timed as to be in perfect synchrony with the history of our bodies, and in such a way that it seems to us that we are the cause of some but not other of its movements, which are—*mirabile dictu*—precisely those which we intend!
>
> (Bhaskar 1979:133)

But where Descartes invoked God to explain the correspondence between thinking and being, Chomksy claims that it is 'just blind luck if the human science-forming capacity, a particular component of the human biological endowment, happens to yield a result that conforms more or less to the truth about the world' (Chomsky 1988:156–7).

But is it so hard to see that this biologising of Cartesian dualism merely reproduces its metaphysical problematic within a fake 'materialism'?[14] The mind-body duality is overcome in its immediately idealist and spiritualist form, since both 'mental' and 'physical' are seen as attributes of the one body. But

the cure is no better than the disease. With 'knowledge' as an innate biological substance ('internal' and 'individual'), an irresolvable mind-world problem is created. For if (as yet unknown) properties of brain matter 'matched', say,the material captured interaction by Ohm's law, then this would be pure coincidence, the phenomena involved having no causal interrelation, and we would not (could not) know about it: we would have no way of escaping our biologically fixed conceptions of the object in order to check its *real* properties. In any case, such an intersection would still not give us *knowledge:* the fact that a football and the sun 'intersect' in their spherical form does not mean that the football knows about the sun or vice versa. The logical outcome of this view of concepts is, in fact, solipsism.[15] If one can swallow Chomsky's innate carburettors and his miraculous intersections then, as Bhaskar puts it in relation to the theory of parallelism, 'one might as well set all scepticism aside and accept that there are fairies at the bottom of the garden, and gnomes to boot!' (Bhaskar 1979:136).

Status

To a casual reader of Chomsky's non-technical writings, it may appear that he is a robust advocate of a realist view of science:

> [T]n rational inquiry we idealize to selected domains in such a way (we hope) as to permit us to discover crucial features of the world. Data and observations, in the sciences, have an instrumental character. They are of no particular interest in themselves, but only insofar as they constitute evidence that permits one to determine fundamental features of the real world.
>
> (Chomsky 2000:49)

His own linguistic investigations appear to be pursued with similar realist commitment:

> In the corner of science in which I work, when I propose a technical concept embedded in a theoretical framework, I mean others to understand *that I intend it to refer to something real–typically, some state or property of the brain, ultimately.*
>
> (Chomsky 1993:28; emphasis added)

Furthermore, Chomsky fends off his positivist critics by telling a story about the historical development of science in which ideas about what may exist and what does exist have been periodically overturned and revised. What seemed to science to be incredible or impossible yesterday (for example, gravity as a force acting 'at a distance')[16] is today's matter-of-fact. His point is that one should be open-minded about what properties matter may have and should not draw arbitrary lines between 'material' and 'mental' phenomena. Objections to UG or to innate concepts are based, he argues, on just such dogmatic, preconceived notions of matter.

This is a good ploy, but hardly convincing. His own reductionism, as noted above, is an excellent instance of unscientific dogmatism. Moreover, one should not confuse open-mindedness with empty-headedness. This is not putting philosophy above or in the way of science; rather, it is requiring that particular scientific hypotheses be seen in the light of, and in relation to, both what we know about the world *and* about what we know about how we come to know it. On the other hand, reductive materialism (like Chomsky's) 'is only really plausible', as Bhaskar rightly maintains, 'if one thinks of a single mind and a single body, in isolation from other persons and in abstraction from the rest of nature, and *inquiries into the manner of their connection*' (1979:134; emphasis added).[17] It is because nativism contradicts what we know about scientific discovery and thought, as well as about the social nature of all human activity (including language), that we must reject it as unscientific. This is why Pateman's claim that there are 'no metascientific principles against an innate Language Acquisition Device' (1987:8) misses the point: the objections to such a device are *scientific* in the sense just explained.

In any case, the realist tenor of Chomsky's remarks is really a deception, given his views on concepts examined earlier. The terms he uses, such as 'real world', 'discover', 'knowledge', 'objects', and so on, really need to be re-translated into the solipsistic biological idiom. The phrase 'discovering the real properties of objects' should be understood to mean something like 'interpreting empirical data as instances of biologically determined categories' or, moregrandly, 'projecting *a priori* categories of mind onto unknowable things-in-themselves'. By his own arguments, the concepts and technical terms of his linguistic theory must be considered the product of SFF. Whether such things *really* exist he is not in a position to say. The very theory of mind which Chomsky advocates precludes the claim that the mind as he sees it is real. The simple fact is that if you believe in innate ideas (in original or modernised variants) then you cannot be a philosophical realist.[18]

To summarise, Chomskyan nativism, which 'wavers between an antediluvian spiritualism and a genuinely "vulgar" materialism' (Timpanaro 1980:208), is a structure built on Humean and Kantian premisses. Empirical hypotheses, or alleged empirical discoveries, in linguistics, *to the extent that they follow from such premisses,* are *bogus*. Chomsky's innate grammar is not a scientific *discovery* but is falsely inferred from *indefensible philosophical premisses*.[19] So when Chomsky says, for example, that the speed and precision with which children pick up new words '*leaves no real alternative to the conclusion* that the child somehow has the concepts available before experience with language and is basically learning labels for concepts that are already part of his or her conceptual apparatus' (Chomsky 1988:28; emphasis added), this is a Humean *deduction* or *inference* rather than an empirical argument.

Conclusions and implications

So far I have argued that grammatical (and conceptual, moral, and so on) phenomena *cannot be innate*. However, I am not implying by this that children are capable of *learning* the specific linguistic mechanisms postulated by Chomsky and

that he claims are innate. I wish to argue that realism has a problem not only with the nativist doctrine as such but also with the specifically *linguistic* content of Chomsky's theory. This is because his apparently empirical linguistic constructs are derived by the same 'methods of rational inquiry' whose philosophical premisses we have already examined.[20] In fact, Chomsky's whole research programme can be understood as the consistent and repeated commission of the epistemic fallacy in its various forms.

Collier identifies four different forms of the fallacy:

> (1) the question whether something exists gets reduced to the question whether we can know that it exists; (2) the question what *sort* of thing something is gets reduced to the question *how* we know about it; (3) the question whether A has causal/ontological primacy over B gets reduced to the question whether knowledge of A is presupposed by knowledge of B; (4) the question whether A is identical to B gets reduced to the question whether our way of knowing A is identical to our way of knowing B.
>
> (Collier 1994:76–7)

We have already seen the fallacy at work–in form (2) according to Collier's scheme–in the 'poverty of the stimulus argument'. Form (2) is also active in the construction of Chomsky's theoretical linguistic principles. Thus, using his own and other people's introspection or intuition as his main instrument for finding out about the grammatical properties of sentences, Chomsky takes these properties to *be* mental phenomena to start with, which are only manifested indirectly (externalised) in the actual sentences or utterances of a public language. As we have seen, he conceives his object of inquiry as 'I-language', a purely internal form of mental (read 'biological') computation that actually has no intrinsic communicative or linguistic (as conventionally understood) properties.[21]

Form (4) of the Fallacy is also in evidence. Collier illustrates this form with 'Descartes's proof that he is two distinct substances':

> Having 'proved' that he is a conscious being (mind) at an early (and indubitable) stage of the argument, and that he is an extended being (body) only at a later stage and with the aid of theology, he takes the conscious and extended beings to be two beings, instead of concluding that he is a being that is both conscious and extended.
>
> (Collier 1994:77)

Similarly, Chomsky, having 'proved' that speakers have intuitions about grammatical form that are separate and independent from their intuitions about meaning, concluded, in his very earliest generative work, that grammatical form and meaning were to be treated separately. Thus, noting that form and meaning do not *immediately coincide* in the sentence, Chomsky took them to be independent realms. Grammar, he argued, 'is best formulated as a self-contained study independent of semantics' (Chomsky 1957:106) despite 'the fact that

there are striking correspondences' between grammar and semantics (1957:101). Hence the linguistic phenomenon, which is in actual fact *both* form *and* meaning, was construed as two independent substances by this fallacious fragmentation, a fragmentation which, in later publications, came to be dressed in full and explicit Cartesian apparel. As other attributes of linguistic phenomena were noted, they too were hived off into their own separate modules or subsystems. In this way, the complex dialectical whole of the language utterance is mechanistically fractured into many abstract aspects or attributes, each with its own independent subsystem of combinatorial rules, and can be reconstituted only by interaction between subsystems according to principles that appear to be quite arbitrary. Indeed, the very arbitrariness of the principles (and the consequent impossibility of learning them) appears to reinforce the argument for their innateness.

This analysis of the 'surface forms' of language (that is, meaningful utterances) as being the concrete resultant of the joint action of independent principles mimics the kind of explanatory theoretical depth to be found in the natural sciences, and Chomsky is not backward in drawing scientific parallels in this vein between his system and modern theoretical physics. However, in reality, this formalist's paradise of a conception is the *reductio ad absurdum* of his 'methods of rational inquiry'. Chomsky's linguistic principles are an artefact of his seeing the phenomenon in the way he sees it. The reductionist, Humean-Kantian gaze tears the utterance out of the social event of communicative intercourse, dismembers its meaningful body, and replaces it with a mute, individual, internal and solipsistic device operating on the abstracted shards of the organic linguistic whole. In short, language is fetishised and the acquisition of language mystified.[22] The epistemic fallacy in various forms, then, pervades the assumptions, methodology and theoretical constructions of Chomskyan linguistics. Consequently, the realist argument with Chomsky is not just about whether his postulated linguistic mechanisms are innate or not, but is also about the very possibility of such mechanisms themselves.

To summarise, Chomskyan innate ideas (whether grammatical or conceptual) are not a scientific discovery but the result of an illegitimate reduction of the social and cultural to the biological, a reduction motivated by idealist philosophical principles. The terminological conversion of Platonic and Cartesian doctrines into biological discourse merely preserves the ontological and epistemological commitments of these doctrines in a different form. For all these reasons, critical realism should reject as unscientific both the general principles as well as the technical details of Chomsky's nativist linguistics.

A realist linguistics, it seems to me, would place language squarely within the domain of social phenomena and therefore amenable only to social scientific explanation. Of course, social life does not magically detach itself from biological processes but both presupposes and transcends them. As Sayer (1997:479) puts it:

> To be able to understand the specificity of the social while acknowledging the validity of the realist concept of nature, we need to recognise how the social can be both dependent on and irreducible to–or emergent from–the material processes studied by the natural sciences (Bhaskar 1979, Collier 1994).

He continues:

> Thus, biological, chemical and physical powers are necessary conditions for the existence of the social world but the latter has properties—particularly, or 'essentially', communicative interaction and discourse, which are irreducible to or emergent from these ontological strata.
>
> (Sayer 1997:464)

This makes language an 'essentially' (Sayer 1997) social phenomenon in that the 'natural processes' of body and brain on which it undoubtedly depends are not innately specified but are themselves *formed* in the development and exercise of the social practice of linguistic interaction itself, and therefore cannot be rationally explained independently of that social practice.

Furthermore, a realist linguistics would avoid the fallaciously motivated disjunctions and dualisms of form and meaning, and of ('external') communication and ('internal') language, on which Chomskyan theory is premissed. By contrast, the object of its investigation would be the very *social act* of communicative interaction by means of meaningful utterances.[23] An utterance is a unity of form (for example, articulated sound in the case of speech) and meaning—a meaning-*ful* form—rather than a combination of the two independently existing 'essences' of form and meaning. Meaning is an attribute or function of the form itself, a function bestowed on it by people and between people in the course of their joint activity and intercourse. Thus, the task of a realist linguistics would be to explain how such systems of meaningful form might take shape and develop within social intercourse. Thereafter, the relative independence of linguistic form and meaning to which Chomskyan theory appeals, and which is evident from early on in children's language development, could be viewed as the consequence of an *emergent functional differentiation* within the whole communicative system, and the logic of this differentiation could be problematised as a key topic for empirical investigation and theoretical explanation.

In conclusion, it seems that critical realism has a valid contribution to make in the field of linguistics. It provides the resources for a thoroughgoing critique of idealist and reductionist theories such as Chomsky's and helps to point the way towards a genuine empirical science of language as an emergent social phenomenon.

Notes

1 The present work is a much revised version of an earlier piece (Jones 1994). I would like to thank Justin Cruickshank for his encouragement in writing this chapter and for some very helpful discussions of the topic. Needless to say, he is not to be held accountable for the views expressed.

2 I am grateful to Geoffrey Sampson for a number of discussions of Chomsky. Naturally, he is not to be held responsible for any of the arguments expressed herein. Despite our very different philosophical preferences, I would highly recommend Sampson (1999) for its thorough critique of Chomskyan nativism.

3 Chomsky sees the SFF as 'the particular collection of qualities and abilities we use in conducting naturalistic inquiry' and, like the language faculty, 'both very rich and very impoverished, as any biological system is expected to be' (Chomsky 2000:121). Chomsky's views on the degree of innate fixity of scientific concepts have shifted to some extent over the years; see Sampson (1999) for a more detailed discussion of this issue.

4 Pateman finds 'a strong argument in favour of *some* conception of innate cognitive or grammatical resources' in the fact that 'linguists of different persuasions find it necessary to invoke them in order to account for facts of child language development' (1987:125). But this is a *non-argument,* a variant of the old 'if lots of people believe it, there must be something in it' ploy.

5 On this very point I sharply disagree with the general position on the relationship between philosophy and science adopted by Collier in an earlier discussion of epistemological materialism:

> [e]pistemological materialism manifestly does not rule out idealist theories of history and society, provided these theories have the *form* of objective science. Part of the point of epistemological materialism is its indifference to the content of the sciences, leaving each science free to discover the nature of its own real object. Once again, this is Lenin's point that if physicists redefine matter, such a redefinition would have no implications for the *philosophical* concept of matter; conversely, philosophy has no right to legislate as to how each science should define its own object.
>
> (Co©llier 1979:40)

Collier seems to misunderstand Lenin here. The point of Lenin's publication (1962) was to rebut the attempts by some scientists (and philosophers) to redefine matter as 'a complex of sensations'. The philosophical concept of matter defended by Lenin was certainly not indifferent to *this* content, despite the 'objective form of science' given by his opponents to their arguments. Surely, a philosophy that can do no more than check out the verbal construction of arguments is not worthy of the name.

6 Chomsky (1988:162) uses this argument in an explicit attack on the Marxist tradition, which he regards as imbued with a variant of empiricist ideology.

7 The 'form of Leibnizian pre-established harmony of monads' to which CSM reduces is one in which 'each person's neuro-physiology is so synchronized with every other's that it appears *as if* they were talking and laughing, smiling and winking. And in which each person's neurophysiology is so synchronized with the nature of every other object that it appears *as if* they were fitting and turning, digging and building' (Bhaskar 1979:135–6). Chomsky achieves a similar 'synchronization' of being and thinking by appealing to a 'biological miracle'; see below.

8 On occasion, Chomsky has considered extending his nativist approach to the sphere of social interaction itself, speculating that we might have 'a sort of "universal grammar" of possible forms of social interaction, and it is this system which helps us to organize intuitively our imperfect perceptions of social reality' (1979:69–70).

9 Bhaskar (1986:2), in Collier (1994:69n), is referring to 'Kneale, Waismann, Hanson, Scriven, Polyani *(sic),* Toulmin, Hesse and Harré'.

10 See Bhaskar (1979:129) for a discussion of the 'RRRE' method of: resolution (of complex events into constituent causes); redescription (of component causes); retrodiction (to possible antecedent causes); elimination (of possible alternative causes). This means seeking causes that are not directly manifest in their effects, *contra*

empiricism and inductivism, as causal mechanisms exist in open systems, and so effects are the changing result of contingent interactions between different generative mechanisms.

11 Cf. Bhaskar's critique of CSM: 'it cannot be said that brain processes are *about* anything, that they are meaningful, or that they are true or false' (1979:130).

12 Chomsky describes 'Hume's principle that the "identity which we ascribe" to things is "only a fictitious one"', which is 'established by the human understanding', as 'very plausible' (2000:16).

13 Cf. Bhaskar: '[n]o end to this process of the successive discovery and description of ever new and deeper, and explanatorily more basic, strata can be envisaged' (1978:168–9).

14 Timpanaro rightly notes: '[n]either language nor knowledge is possible without that extremely complex nervous structure which is the human brain, and which has taken shape through a process of biological evolution. But it is clear that "innatism" (assuming one wishes to use this term) in this biological sense has nothing to do with the innatism of the philosophical tradition and with its spiritualist presuppositions' (1980:147n).

15 A position advocated by Chomskyans such as Fodor; see, for example, Fodor (1980).

16 An example frequently invoked by Chomsky; see, for example, Chomsky (2000).

17 Cf. a similar point made by Engels:

> [a]s soon as each special science is bound to make clear its position in the great totality of things *and of our knowledge of things,* a special science dealing with this totality is superfluous [or unnecessary]. That which still survives, independently, of all earlier philosophy is the science of thought and its laws–formal logic and dialectics. Everything else is subsumed in the positive science of nature and history.
>
> (1936:36; emphasis added)

18 Cf. Collier: '[e]ven though non-realists may in the end turn out to be realists about something, they have a characteristic position, in that they deny that there is anything knowable that is independent of mind' (1994:12).

19 Lakoff and Johnson (1999), quite correctly, view Chomskyan linguistics as empirically unfounded, *a priori* philosophy dressed up as science.

20 A technical discussion of Chomsky's theory is clearly inappropriate here for various reasons. Instead, I refer the reader to Sampson (1999), Lakoff (1987), and Lakoff and Johnson (1999) for criticisms; see also Jones (1995).

21 In fact, he notes: '[s]ome other organism might, in principle, have the same I-language (brain state) as Peter, but embedded in performance systems that use it for locomotion' (Chomsky 2000:27).

22 The theoretical abstractions Chomsky deals in are the kind of 'violent abstraction', both formal and incomplete, that Marx critiqued (see Ilyenkov: 1982). For a similar critique of the Chomskyan approach to the linguistic phenomenon of 'anaphora' see Jones (1995).

23 'The actual reality of language-speech is not the abstract system of linguistic forms, not the isolated monologic utterance, and not the psychophysiological act of its implementation, but the social event of verbal interaction implemented in an utterance or utterances' (Voloshinov 1973:94). My suggestions for a linguistics informed by critical realism draw heavily on Voloshinov's blistering critique of traditional linguistics that, to this day, though written in the late 1920s, has lost none of its force.

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Part III

Method, politics and policy

6 Underlabouring and unemployment

Notes for developing a critical realist approach to the agency of the chronically unemployed

Justin Cruickshank

Underlabouring

The social ontology developed by Bhaskar and Archer

As there is no theory-neutral observation, our access to the world is mediated by precepts. Of primary importance are our precepts about being, that is, our ontological precepts. As regards social reality, our ontological precepts will concern individuals' ability to exercise free will and the range of enablements and constraints that the social context furnishes. That is, our primary precepts will turn on the structure-agency problematic. The assumptions we have about what affects individuals' agency will influence how we interpret social and political events. Put simply, a committed individualist, who may see individuals, their actions and the unintended consequences of those actions, would hold that reference to a social reality that was not reducible down to individuals entailed reification; while a structuralist/holist may happily regard people as determined automata, and say that in observing individuals we are observing the effects of structures.

The point here is not so much that both views are erroneous conceptions of social ontology (for evacuating any real notion of society, and for treating reified structures as agents, respectively). Rather, it is that with such extreme views, any research would be cut to fit the ontology. Someone who held to an atomistic individualism would not seek to gain knowledge of how social factors influenced individuals, or perhaps would re-interpret research on such matters in terms of individuals' dispositions and actions. A holist, on the other hand, may not need to bother with research into what individuals are doing, as knowledge of the structures that determine behaviour yields all the knowledge one needs to explain social reality: why study individuals, the epiphenomenal bearers of structures, when we have knowledge of the structures ?

What is required therefore is a social ontology that can say how individuals' agency is mediated by social factors that are irreducible down to individuals. This social ontology ought to be constructed so that it guides research, rather than forcing research findings to fit preconceived categories. An ontology that

can resolve the structure-agency problematic, by saying how social reality provides enablements and constraints for individuals, is required to function as an 'underlabourer', providing precepts to guide research, and avoiding the role of 'master-builder', whereby an ontology is taken to be a definitive map of social facts. Where an underlabouring ontology may guide research, a master-builder ontology may make research pointless (as one has the facts), or an exercise in arbitrarily verifying an ontology already 'known' to be true.

Critical realism can resolve the structure-agency problem using the notion of 'emergent properties'. In his seminal *The Possibility of Naturalism* (1998), Bhaskar developed an immanent critique of various attempts to resolve the structure-agency problem, by Weber, Durkheim, and Berger and Luckmann. He argues that Weber lacked the ontological resources to explain structural factors, Durkheim lacked the ontological resources to explain agency, while Berger and Luckmann produced a 'dialectical' position that puts all the emphasis on agency and then all the emphasis on structure. Bhaskar, drawing upon his earlier work on the philosophy of science, which turned upon defining natural reality in terms of emergent properties, argues in *The Possibility of Naturalism* that the social sciences have the same form of object of study, viz. emergent properties. The emergent properties in this case concern social structures that are created by the actions of individuals, but which then exert a causal influence over individuals, although individuals retain the power to alter social structures.

Archer (1995) elaborates this basic ontology put forward by Bhaskar. She makes a distinction between structural emergent properties (SEPs) such as the relations of capitalism, cultural emergent properties (CEPs), and people's emergent properties (PEPs). Archer's notion of CEPs is, as she notes, very similar to Popper's (1972) 'World Three'. This is because just as Popper argues that 'objective knowledge' (in the form of books and so on) is external to individuals, so Archer argues that cultural systems, such as religious doctrines, can exist as objective factors in their own right. Viewing cultural systems as emergent properties means that we can explain the longevity of cultural systems, such as Catholicism. If Catholicism were reducible to the beliefs held by a set of individuals in the present, it would be difficult to explain the continuity of this cultural system and its influence in shaping individuals' identities. Indeed, it would be more likely that Catholicism would be changed 'overnight' by a few people simply changing their minds, or simply forgetting some aspect of the doctrine. However, this is not meant to imply that CEPs, or SEPs for that matter, determine individuals' thoughts and actions, as individuals have the capacity to change the prevailing SEPs and CEPs, although this may take a very long time.[1]

In her description of PEPs, Archer makes a distinction between the actor and the agent. She argues that the actor is an individual, while agents are collectivities. Agents can, according to Archer, be subdivided into primary and corporate agents. Primary agents are groups with a shared situation, shared interests, and so on, who do not mobilise to pursue their goals; corporate agents, on the other hand, do mobilise to pursue their goals. Actors within agents may

be assigned roles but, as actors are not determined, they can choose how to perform their allotted role.

While CEPs, SEPs and PEPs are all interconnected in reality, Archer argues that we need to separate them analytically in order to study their interplay, and this leads her to argue for 'analytic dualism' (as opposed to 'philosophical'–that is, ontological–dualism). This analytic dualism underpins Archer's 'morpho genetic method', whereby she argues that research, first of all, should posit a description of the structural factors (that is, SEPs and CEPs); then discuss the socio-cultural agency of groups; and then conclude by describing how the structural factors have been modified (giving us 'morphogenesis'), or reproduced (giving us 'morphostasis').

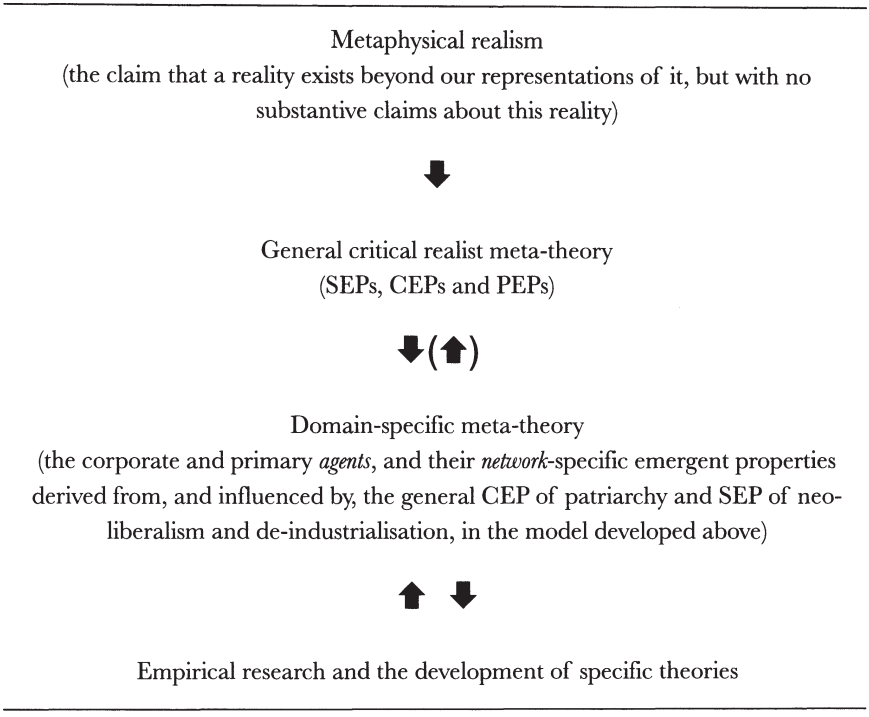
Some critiques of underlabouring

Thus, the critical realist ontology outlined above is meant to function as an underlabourer. Researchers are meant to draw upon the theory, treating it as a useful 'toolkit' to assist research. The realist ontology of structure and agency is therefore a meta-theory, as it is a general theory designed to inform the construction of more specific theories in the course of empirical research. For some critics, though, the notion of a meta-theory is objectionable. Some, especially those influenced by the work of the later Wittgenstein such as Shotter (1992), think that a general theory will be a vacuous attempt to capture some universal features underlying forms of life which are different, and which cannot be 'boiled down' to some transcultural essential property.

Others, including some Marxists such as Gunn (1988), think that the use of a meta-theory, or any form of starting/first principles, would entail an infinite regression, as a justification is sought for the starting point, which then requires a justification of the new starting point, and so on *ad infinitum*. Or, as Gunn argues, it would produce tautological results. Such results would arise, it is argued, because the general principles would be unable to explain the specifics dealt with in empirical research, and so the specifics would simply be redescribed as emergent properties, so that emergent properties would then be defined by the research findings that were redescribed as emergent properties.

In order to overcome this latter objection, it is necessary to move from the general meta-theory and to construct a domain-specific meta-theory. This means developing an immanent critique of the terms of reference used by existing perspectives on a substantive research topic before developing a new set of terms of reference to overcome the problems located. In developing the new terms of reference, the general meta-theory that defines social being (in terms of SEPs, CEPs and PEPs) would be drawn upon. This domain-specific meta-theory would then be used to inform empirical research and the construction of specific theories. In the course of research the domain-specific meta-theory may be revised, as its precepts are meant to represent not an infallible fiat concerning social reality, but fallible guiding principles that are open to revision. (See Figure 6.1.)

Figure 6.1 Levels of realist theorising



Using a domain-specific meta-theory as an underlabourer for empirical research would avoid the possibility of a tautological outcome, as the domain-specific meta-theory would be constructed via a dialogue with existing theories and the findings of empirical research. Instead of using some unwieldy general principles, which are read into research and then justified by saying that the research shows that such general principles exist, giving us a dogmatic monologue, a meta-theory would be developed by engaging with the precepts already used within research, and by constructing some new terms of reference to overcome the shortcomings of those earlier terms of reference. We would therefore be developing an improved perspective from the inside but with reference to reality. We would be able to maintain both that propositions are true if they correspond to reality (the correspondence theory of truth), and that we could never step outside perspectives to see reality in itself (an anti-foundational view of knowledge), as Collier (1994), Popper (1972) and Searle (1995) argue (albeit in different ways). That is, we could improve the precepts used in research by developing an immanent critique of those precepts, which means criticising perspectives from the inside (rather than from an aperspectival position that presumed to mirror reality), and doing so by criticising them in relation to the reality they purport to explain.

It may be objected that a domain-specific meta-theory constructed in such a fashion would still have to draw upon the general critical realist ontology of

SEPs, CEPs and PEPs, whatever the immanent critique of substantive research-related theories, which returns us to the argument that explains the particular by the general because the particular is read to fit the general. Against this objection it may be argued that such general precepts were themselves developed via an immanent critique (of alternative accounts of social being), and that such precepts are necessary starting points, because before one can engage with terms of reference concerning substantive topics, one needs a general account of being in order to develop terms of reference that do not overemphasise individuals or structures, or arbitrarily stress the power of individuals and structures at different junctures.

Having set out some theoretical reasons for developing a domain-specific meta-theory, the next step is to begin developing such a meta-theory by engaging with some approaches to a substantive research topic. The substantive area of research addressed here is that of the coping strategies of the chronically unemployed. Obviously, in the space of this chapter it is not possible to discuss all of the different approaches to this issue or to discuss any one approach in great depth. Nevertheless, it is possible to begin sketching out the contents of a domain-specific meta-theory for research into this topic. Given the present space constraints, I have chosen to contrast approaches that posit the notion of an 'underclass', and which are concerned with defining a group characteristic, with approaches that use qualitative research methods to understand individuals' coping strategies for dealing with chronic unemployment. Another way of putting this is to say that essentialist arguments will be contrasted with qualitative arguments. While the latter are a corrective to the former, the latter still have some problems of their own. In beginning to redress these problems, by developing a realist meta-theory, it is hoped that the arguments against essentialist positions–positions adopted by the New Right to criticise unemployed people–can be strengthened.

Essentialism and the concept of an underclass

The existence of a group of people who are chronically unemployed has led many commentators to make a distinction between the 'deserving poor' and the 'undeserving poor'. The deserving poor are rendered poor by 'structural' factors such as job loss, or by being employed in jobs that pay low wages, and they are deemed to be able to work their way out of unemployed poverty or, if employed in a low-wage job, to 'work their way up'. Whatever the circumstances, the deserving poor are regarded as respectable in the sense that they are responsible, meaning that they will do what they can to 'look after themselves' and will avoid turning to crime or seeing welfare as a 'right'. The deserving poor deserve charity or welfare, when necessary, precisely because they do not consider 'living off others' as their right. Conversely, the undeserving poor deserve no charity or welfare because they take no responsibility for themselves and have no respect for others' property. They expect welfare as a right, they have families that they cannot support (with the man fleeing family responsibility, and the (young) women having families to receive social housing and benefits), and they may turn to crime, especially if drugs are being taken.

The undeserving poor are an 'underclass' whereas the deserving poor are working class. Members of the working class may experience economic hardship but they are part of 'normal society' because they respect the law, take a responsible attitude towards families and value work. The underclass is *under* the respectable poor of the working class, and thus beneath the lowest layer of normal society, because it deviates from the key norms concerning work, property and families. Having this class existing beneath society is seen as a threat because it is thought that this class may 'contaminate' the lower sections of the working class. The underclass is not a problem simply because of the crime its members may commit or the money spent on welfare that may have been spent elsewhere, but, so the argument goes, because its existence is an affront to normal society and its deviancy may spread to threaten the core values and institutions of normal society.

This definition of the underclass has been constructed from various nineteenth-century arguments about the existence of a 'substratum', a 'residuum' and a'lumpenproletariat', together with twentieth-century arguments about a 'culture of poverty' and the 'cycle of deprivation'. The nineteenth-century arguments held that while the working class may experience problems as a result of structural factors, and overcome these structural problems through individual agency, the underclass are a 'sub-race', born to be deviant or 'subnormal'. These views were shared by both reformers and those who advocated a laissez-faire approach to economics and politics. Marx differed, regarding the lumpenproletariat as a class formed by structural factors, viz. a shift to an industrial capitalist economy Nevertheless, he still retained negative views of this underclass, maintaining that they would act in a mercenary fashion, while being paid by the forces of reaction, against the revolutionaries because they were 'outside' the historical class struggle between the proletariat and the bourgeoisie (Marx 1990:229).

The twentieth-century culturalist arguments, as favoured by those of the New Right, took basically the same form as the earlier, nineteenth-century arguments about the underclass. Instead of a deviant sub-race they focused on a deviant subculture. This deviant subculture was regarded as self-reproducing, the argument being that men would have children without assuming responsibility for them, the women would seek to get pregnant in order to receive social housing and benefits, and the children, having no male to discipline them, would 'run wild' and grow up being too ill-disciplined to enter paid work, expecting welfare as a right. Whereas sterilisation was mooted in the nineteenth century to stop the underclass reproducing, cutting welfare payments was seen as the answer in the twentieth century.

Such arguments may be referred to as 'essentialist' because they assume the existence of some fixed 'essential property'–in this case, essential in the sense that it determines the behaviour of the putative underclass. Thus, to know the essential property is to know exactly how members of the underclass will behave and what causes that behaviour, the essential properties here being an alleged sub-race and a putative subculture. With this essentialism we therefore have the use of a master-builder ontology, of 'racial' or cultural factors. This ontology is taken as providing a list of all the relevant facts, which are simply 'known to

be true'. Thus, when research in the nineteenth century indicated that structural factors were causing poverty, it was not used to rebut the notion of an underclass; rather, it was used to explain the conditions of the putative 'deserving poor' who could overcome their situation by working hard, while an underclass 'sub-race' was posited on the grounds that it was already 'known' to exist, caused by 'racial' factors, independent of the trade cycle and working conditions. Similarly, culturalist arguments rely on generalising from anecdote and using statistical data to read off character traits of individuals in certain areas (thus committing the ecological fallacy). That is, 'prior knowledge' about the existence of a subculture is verified by the anecdotal, and taken to be directly manifest in statistical data that 'speaks for itself', while descriptions of correlations are taken as explanations of causal factors between, for instance, levels of single parenthood and crime.[2]

Although this essentialist argument may not cause surprise when driven by an ideological concern negatively to people who are unemployed, using 'prior knowledge' of a putative homogeneous collectivity, it is important to note that essentialism enters into the work of people who are opposed to the New Right culturalist arguments about the underclass. Wilson (1987), writing about the existence of a black urban underclass in the US, takes issue with Murray, arguing that the real value of welfare has decreased, contrary to Murray's (1984) assertion that an increase in welfare encouraged people to choose welfare over work and to turn to crime because of a loss of any sense of responsibility.[3] Yet Wilson's argument ends up being predicated upon a form of essentialism. Wilson argues that a black urban underclass was created by deindustrialisation and that this structural change lead to a cultural change, viz. the formation of an underclass culture or, as he calls it, 'ghetto-specific behaviour' (1987:138). This argument is essentialist because once the structural decline has created a ghetto-specific culture then this becomes a self-reproducing culture and individuals' behaviour is taken to be identical with the posited model of culture.

Bagguley and Mann argue that

> Wilson's analysis is prone towards the 'ecological fallacy'. That is, Wilson's data is mainly in the form of aggregate census tracts from which he generalizes about the characteristics of individual people within the geographical areas of the census tracts. Consequently […] Wilson leaves the door open for the 'culture of poverty' explanations.
>
> (1992:115)

What this means is that Wilson takes the existence of a homogeneous culture 'as read' and then verifies this by turning to statistical descriptions of certain factors, presuming such data directly mirrors the character traits and behaviour of individuals in the underclass. Although his intention was to challenge New Right commentators such as Murray, he ends up with a similar argument about a homogeneous and self-reproducing underclass culture.

Qualitative approaches to the agency of the chronically unemployed

If essentialist approaches can use an ontological master-builder to construct a world-view that pays little attention to the reality of people's lives, then qualitative approaches ought to rectify this, given the emphasis of such approaches on studying people's actual actions and reasons. In this section of the chapter I will discuss the qualitative work of the sociologist MacDonald and the political journalist Campbell. Both study people who New Right commentators would classify as underclass individuals, but their descriptions of such people are very different from those of the New Right.

MacDonald and fiddly job seekers

MacDonald (1994), in a study of a de-industrialised area (Cleveland, UK), argues that while some people remain fairly inactive following the loss of their jobs, others are able to get 'fiddly jobs' (meaning jobs undertaken illegally while claiming benefit), by using the 'right pubs' in which subcontractors seek people to employ. In this situation, men are able to get work in the remaining industrial sector, working long hours for extremely low pay (without any insurance). In order to get such work the men need to have reputations as 'hard workers' who will not complain about the poor pay and conditions. They also have to pay a 'tax' to the subcontractor for employing them. MacDonald gives the example of 'Stephen', a 25-year-old man who worked twelve-hour shifts for seven days a week to take home £60 per week (1994:514–15). The women who are able to find fiddly jobs, according to MacDonald, tend to work in the service sector, and earn even lower wages. Here MacDonald cites the example of 'Muriel' who took home £35 a week for working in a private nursing home, which brought her weekly income to just under £70 (1994:517).

The people interviewed by MacDonald included those who did not work in fiddly jobs as well as those who did. Those who did work in fiddly jobs argued that such work was needed to support themselves and their families. That is, such people argued that they were acting in a responsible way, to do what they could for their families. They agreed with the view that people should work to support themselves and their families and that, if necessary, this would mean doing fiddly jobs. Those who did not work in fiddly jobs tended, on the whole, to support this view that undertaking fiddly work was a legitimate activity. Many, though, were hostile to criminal activity for the sake of sheer profit. Thus, if some people had organised a fraud to make large sums of money from the welfare system, this action would have been regarded as illegitimate and those involved may have been reported. Contrary to the New Right polemicists, who believed that many people 'on the dole' (that is, in receipt of welfare) expected 'something for nothing', MacDonald shows that people wanted to work, and sought out what work was available in order to do what they could to support themselves. The actions of those seeking fiddly jobs may have been illegal, but their normative

commitment, and the normative commitment of many of their peers, was to mainstream values concerning work and self-reliance.

Campbell and the role of gender

Campbell (1993), in her book *Goliath: Britain's Dangerous Places,* takes issue with the New Right view that men living in chronically depressed areas have a masculinity which is different from that of men living in 'normal society'. She argues that patriarchal culture is based on the exclusion of women from the public sphere, which men seek to dominate. In areas that are not chronically depressed, men seek to exclude women from jobs (or at least those perceived as 'breadwinner jobs', confining women to less important roles), and in the areas that *are* chronically depressed, the patriarchal norms about controlling the public sphere mean that men form gangs to control the estates, restricting women to the private sphere or even excluding them from the estate qua 'their space'.

In her research Campbell found that, while older men tended to stay at home but refused to play a role in domestic responsibilities (seeing such activity as 'unmanly'), many young men spent their time 'with their mates', that is, in gangs. These gangs would exercise their control over 'their space' by being destructive consumers rather than defensive workers. What this means is that many of 'the lads' would engage in 'joyriding', that is, the act of stealing and racing around in powerful cars that are then burnt out. The car is literally consumed: used for the pleasure it gives and then destroyed. None of the lads wanted to own a car (even if they could afford it), because that would entail responsibility and detract from the pure pleasure. In order to continue their pleasure after the event, many of the lads video-recorded their driving antics. The lads would also steal (to pay for drink, drugs and (stolen) clothes) and use the houses of young women to escape from their homes. The lads lived with their parents and would use the houses of young women (or rather young mothers) to store stolen goods, and to get drunk or take drugs. The attitude of the lads was that these young mothers were in the lads' territory and thus they would only be accepted if they were of use to the lads. Sometimes a newly arrived young mother would not be accepted: the lads would exert their power over 'their space' by terrorising the mother so that she had to leave the estate.

Some of the older men were involved in organised crime. These men would use women for such tasks as shoplifting and chequebook fraud. The women took some of the main risks while the men took most of the profit. When a woman was caught she was given a beating as a warning not to give the police any information. Some of these men became paranoid; in one case, a man involved in organised crime suspected an old couple living opposite him of observing everything he did (presumably to give information to the police), and so he rammed their front door down with a buttress attached to the front of a car.

The mothers of the lads would try to get their sons to act differently but with little success. If a young man got a young woman pregnant but refused to accept any responsibility for the consequences of his actions, then the young man's

mother would take some responsibility and help the young mother, giving her clothes for the child, inviting her over for meals, and so on. Campbell argues that contrary to the stereotype of the 'feckless' single (young) mother, these young mothers showed resilience and ingenuity in finding ways to support themselves and their children (1993:252).

Some of the older women tried to organise community groups and so play a more constructive role in the public space of the estates. However, the lads often vandalised the buildings used and the older men were frequently hostile and resentful. One such community group failed to develop when the committee was taken over by older men who turned a planned community centre into a drinking club. Furthermore, according to Campbell, the residents viewed the police's attitude as unhelpful. They believed that the police saw them as 'trouble-makers' and that they regarded the estates as areas to be controlled and dominated rather than places in which to work with different agencies. Many of the mothers complained that the police were just as aggressive as the lads. Nevertheless, some community centres were successful: for example, the Cedarwood Wellbeing Women's Group only managed to survive and avoid having its office and exercise equipment stolen by having its members sleep in the centre (1993:244).

In Campbell's argument, the men are presented, on the whole, as being determined by patriarchal gender norms. Whether in the workplace or in depressed urban areas, Campbell argues, men seek to dominate and control public space. In the workplace the men may organise themselves to exclude the women, but on the estates they tend to adopt a more individualist outlook, seeking ways to 'prove themselves as men', paying no regard to the community. The unemployed men view the social world as something over which they need to exert power in one way or another. Having been saturated in images that define masculinity in terms of a man taking control and exerting his will over those around him, young men race stolen cars around for their pleasure and terrorise the other residents, while the older men either refuse to engage in the family (as this is seen as 'women's space') or they enter into organised crime and control people who take most of the risks (usually women). The women, by contrast, are presented by Campbell as having an outlook that is not determined by patriarchal norms. Women on the poor estates are 'outsiders within': in contrast to the prevailing cultural norms that present the image of the family as one where men provide and the women 'make the home', the men fail to provide and act instead in a destructive way, while women struggle against indifferent authorities (or a hostile police force) and organise collectively in the public sphere to improve a difficult situation that (many) men make more difficult.

Assessing the work of Macdonald and Campbell

Both MacDonald's and Campbell's work provides an insight into the coping strategies of the chronically unemployed that essentialism cannot provide, yet there are difficulties with the two approaches. The problem with MacDonald's work is that it adheres to an implicit methodological individualism. As MacDonald

talks of individuals, their beliefs and their actions, he maintains implicitly that social reality is not greater than the sum of individual actions. Not only is this position methodologically problematic–a reference to individuals' actions always includes a reference to social factors (thus precluding a total reduction to individuals)–it is politically problematic, too. A political problem emerges because if one uses a methodological individualist form of explanation, then a normative, or political, individualism may follow. MacDonald can criticise the New Right's views about the 'something for nothing' society in order to show how resourceful people are in difficult circumstances. Yet, given the reference to individuals, one may argue that economic problems are the unintended consequences of individuals' actions (not structural factors in their own right) and that the solution to such problems rests with the resourcefulness of individuals: instead of receiving welfare and doing nothing, they should seek employment and, if some can live on welfare alone, then those in fiddly jobs ought to 'sign-off' from welfare, the albeit low wage being just about higher than welfare (usually), and seek enough employment to keep them going. Or, alternatively, it may be argued from an individualist view that if one is resourceful enough to find employment in a depressed area with high unemployment, then one is resourceful enough to find better employment in a less depressed area. In short, if there are just individuals, then any analysis about how people may improve a situation will turn solely on the notion of individuals' ability, and pay no heed to any contextual factors.

The problem with Campbell's work is that it keeps a 'double set' of ontological books. That is, the men are regarded as cultural dopes, whose thoughts and actions are determined by patriarchy, while the positioning of women as 'outsiders within' affords them a view that is questioning and critical. The danger here, of course, is that Campbell's work may lead to a form of essentialism, whereby men are defined as a homogeneous group whose behaviour directly conforms to prevailing patriarchal norms (the essential property), in contrast to women (or at least women in deprived areas) who are presented as freethinkers, able to question the norms that determine the behaviour of men. To know the norms of patriarchy is thus to know how men will behave, while women have their agency mediated but not determined by the prevailing norms. *Goliath* was intended to be as much a critique of patriarchy (in the context of de-industrialised, neo-liberal economies), as it was a study of how people survive chronic unemployment. Consequently, the result was that the political concern to criticise patriarchy as being destructive, and oppressive towards women, compromised the social scientific concern of prioritising truth over political/normative commitments.

Of course, Campbell's book was written as a piece of political literature, aimed at getting us to 'see things differently', but it is not solely an exercise in persuasive rhetoric; in addition, it sought to rest its critique of patriarchy (in the context of neo-liberalism) on truth claims about culture, policy and people's attitudes. It would be erroneous to hold that Campbell, or indeed any researcher, can find 'the truth' by following some 'method' qua algorithm to unlock reality, or by adhering to an essentialist theory, but if truth claims are being made by a piece of work then we need to examine how those claims are

framed, rather than merely accepting (or rejecting) the conclusions on the basis of our own normative commitments. In other words, even if a book is not written in a strictly social scientific fashion for an academic audience, it is nevertheless the case that considerations about theory and method will be germane to judging how the author of the work argues the case, interprets the data and draws the conclusions, if the book is to be a serious contribution to understanding a social/political issue. Such considerations do not put us in the position of finding 'the truth' but they do help us to develop our approximations to the truth.

Developing a domain-specific meta-theory

Agents and networks

A domain-specific meta-theory, if it was to be used for research into chronic unemployment, would have to engage with a greater range of perspectives than the two outlined above. Nevertheless, in the space remaining, it is possible at least to start developing such a domain-specific meta-theory and, in doing so, I hope to go some way towards showing how critical realism supplies a useful set of conceptual tools for empirical research.

We can begin the task of constructing this domain-specific meta-theory by noting the relevant generic emergent properties. The generic emergent properties in this case would be the SEP of de-industrialising capitalism and the CEP of patriarchy. We can also note the primary and corporate agents: the fiddly job seekers and joyriders, and the community groups and organised crime gangs, respectively. Fiddly job seekers and joyriders are classified here as primary agents because, unlike those in community groups or organised crime, they are agents characterised by individuals in similar positions who do not organise collectively to advance their collective interest.

Relations between individuals/actors within and between these groups/agents may be described in terms of networks. Networks are definable in terms of network-specific CEPs and SEPs. These network-specific CEPs and SEPs are derived from, but also different from, the generic CEPs and SEPs. There are two types of networks, viz. intra-agent CEPs and SEPs for networks internal to agents, and inter-agent CEPs and SEPs for networks that link actors in different agents. These various types of networks may be described as follows.

In the present example, the intra-agent CEP, with the community group as corporate agents, would be a 'feminine' CEP. This CEP would derive partly from the prevailing patriarchal generic CEP, as community groups are mainly run by women and would therefore be in accord with the feminine character norms of inclusivity and responsibility towards others. Yet the CEP would also contain aspects that were critical of patriarchal norms and the notion of women as passive carers. For, as 'outsiders within', the women in such groups would take a critical view of the concept of men as providers, and they would have to confront the notion of women as homemakers in order to organise themselves in the

public sphere. Furthermore, the women are likely to encounter male hostility from the young 'lads' and older men who resented women having a role outside the private sphere, which would put them in direct conflict with those whose identity was more deeply influenced by patriarchal norms. An intra-agent SEP may also exist, provided the relations between the people in the community group became more formalised, and financial arrangements were not simply a matter of individuals dealing with others qua individuals, but in the capacity of more formal roles. The inter-agent CEP would entail formalised relations between a community group and local government agencies, with an inter-agent SEP pertaining to policy-related decision-making, stemming from the more formalised CEP relations.

The intra-agent CEP, with organised crime gangs as corporate agents, would pertain to norms concerning power, exclusivity and domination; the intra-agent SEPs would concern the 'pecking order', or internal hierarchy, within the gangs, based on the power of the leading members over the others. There would be no inter-agent CEPs or SEPs as the gangs would be self-sufficient, and without formalised relations with other groups. If there were links between groups then they might be understood in terms of individuals dealing with other individuals, as the link would be too contingent and specific to constitute an emergent property. (In the case of organised crime 'families', such as the Mafia in the US rather than the crime gangs of depressed urban estates in Britain, it may be that there are intra-agent CEPs and SEPs, with different subgroups having established relations within a larger 'family').

Turning now to primary agents, we can say that fiddly job seekers have an intra-agent network CEP based on the concept of men as 'breadwinners' who can control the private sphere by being the 'provider'. The generic CEP of patriarchy is adapted to suit the situation in which men face the collapse of legitimate jobs, and who have to present themselves as being very tough, that is, as men who will stoically work very long hours for very low pay in difficult conditions. The intra-agent network SEP concerns the material power of the subcontractors who choose who to recruit workers for fiddly jobs. As regards joyriders, the intra-agent network CEP concerns displays of power. The generic CEP of patriarchy is drawn upon by joyriders who seek to exclude others from the public sphere, which they define as their space for their pleasure, and where they engage in displays of power and destruction, racing stolen cars before setting them on fire. There would be no intra-agent SEPs as the young men do not exist in a collectivity with more formalised relations, such as those that exist between, say, fiddly job seekers and subcontractors. No mention is made of inter-agent CEPs or SEPs in connection with primary groups. This is because these groups do not relate to other groups as one agent relating to another, but as individuals in one agent dealing with individuals from other groups (such as their parents, the police, social workers, and so on). (See Figures 6.2–6.4).

Figure 6.2 The relationship between generic and network-specific emergent properties

Generic SEP
(neo-liberalism and de-industrialism)

&

Generic CEP
(patriarchy)

Primary and corporate agents with their own unique network-specific emergent properties derived from the generic CEPs and SEPs

Figure 6.3 Corporate agents and networks

Corporate agent	*Intra-agent network*	*Inter-agent network*
Community groups	CEPs (inclusive attitude of community responsibility) (possibly SEPs , if personal relations become more formalised)	SEPs (policy related)
Crime gangs	CEPs (exclusive attitude: being 'above' the law and the other residents) SEPs (internal hierarchy)	N/A

Figure 6.4 Primary agents and networks

Primary agent	*Intra-agent network CEP*	*Intra-agent network SEP*
Fiddly job seekers	breadwinner and hard worker	material power of subcontractors
Joyriders	displays of power and controlling public space	N/A

Applying the domain-specific meta-theory

The ontology of primary and corporate agents, together with the ontology of network-specific emergent properties that enable and constrain actors within and between agents, may be used to describe the structural conditions at the first point of the morphogenetic cycle. Empirical research into socio-cultural agency and the chronically unemployed would take this domain-specific meta-theory as its working assumption before developing specific theories as the research progressed. During this process, the conceptual contents of the domain-specific meta-theory may be revised, to account for such phenomena as men in community groups who were defined in terms contrary to the patriarchal norms that affect most men. The outcome of the morphogenetic cycle method would be to use (fallible) specific theories, developed in relation to a revisable domain-specific meta-theory, to explain a situation of morphogenesis. The outcome would be one of morphogenesis, or change, because actors would be adapting to the generic CEPs within their specific networks, and devising strategies to deal with the specific effects of the generic SEP within the context of the network in which they were located qua actor.

The approach here, then, is rather Lakatosian. It would consist of a theoretical core furnished by the general realist meta-theory (of CEPs, SEPs and PEPs), a theoretical 'inner-belt' furnished by a domain-specific meta-theory, and an 'outer-belt' in the form of specific theories developed during the course of research. The outer-belt would change as research progressed, to take account of new phenomena, and the inner-belt may also change as the guiding precepts are revised as new factors and fresh data come to light. While two or more critical realists may develop different domain-specific meta-theories (and specific theories) in relation to the same area of empirical research (for example, they might read the existing literature in different ways, seeing different issues), the general core will be one of shared principles that will remain unchanged. However, this is not to say that the theoretical core (that is, Archer's general ontology of CEPs, SEPs and PEPs) is a transhistorical and unrevisable ontology; for one thing, the point was made above that the concepts are not meant to represent fixed essences. Furthermore, it may well be the case that as research continues in different disciplines a new general ontology is eventually developed.

It is a mistake, therefore, to hold that critical realism seeks to make definitive truth claims using a transhistorical essentialist ontology. Such an ontology would be a master-builder ontology; by contrast, the precepts developed by critical realism can function as an underlabourer, acting as a fallible/revisable guide to empirical research. Such precepts are required because research is not theory-neutral, and unless one has an explicit framework the outcome may well be arbitrariness, as mutually exclusive presumptions may be drawn upon. The most important precepts are those concerning being, as assumptions about what exists influence the approach to what exists. Thus, it is necessary, first of all, to resolve the structure-agency problem, or at least to develop the best attempted resolution to date, via an immanent critique of alternative accounts of social being, before using this

resolution to inform a more specific meta-theory with which to guide research. Such an undertaking is important not only on methodological grounds; it is important politically, too: as a consequence of this process, claims made about, for example, inequality and the misrepresentation of particular groups would be more firmly grounded in the reality of the situation. Rhetorical persuasiveness may be powerful, but more is needed than rhetorically powerful arguments, as these can have the supporting assumptions undermined by close scrutiny.

Notes

1 Bhaskar's critiques of Weber and Durkheim are rather schematic and fail to do justice to either writer. Archer (1995) gives a more nuanced critique of ontological alternatives, focusing on methodological individualists (who spoke of individuals *and* 'situational logics'), methodological collectivists (such as Gellner, who were not holists), and Giddens' arguments for 'structuration theory'. The latter is very important as Giddens and Bhaskar were thought by some to be positing the same perspective, even though Giddens explicitly rejects the concept of emergent properties. Giddens, as Archer argues, ends up reducing structures down to individuals' rule-following practices.

2 For a discussion of such essentialist views of the underclass see Bagguley and Mann (1992), Crompton (1993), Gans (1993), Macnicol (1987) and Morris (1994).

3 Murray's work on the US underclass was more of a rational choice argument, insofar as he held that an underclass was created by rational self-interested individuals choosing welfare over work when reforms made welfare easier to obtain, as well as increasing its value. Note, however, that when Murray commented on the existence of an underclass in the UK he put forward culturalist arguments for its creation. By linking the divorce rate to levels of crime, Murray (1990, 2000) argued that the breakdown of family life–and thus the rise of the single mother–was directly responsible for creating an underclass of violent criminals.

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7 New Labour, school effectiveness and ideological commitment

Robert Willmott

Preamble

As Bhaskar (1989:1) argues, we need to take philosophy seriously because it underwrites both what constitutes science and knowledge and which political practices are deemed legitimate. At present, the field of educational research internationally is witnessing a pragmatist trend, whereby practical education research is carried out without reference to ontological and epistemological concerns. For David Reynolds, a leading UK school effectiveness academic, '[p]recisely because we did not waste time on philosophical discussion or on values debates, we made rapid progress' (1998:20). Equally, for Teddlie, '[t]he orientation of many in the US is to do rather than to reflect […] In reality many practitioners are currently interested in what could work at their school […rather…] than in ruminations about social inequalities associated with different socio-economic classes' (Teddlie and Reynolds 2000:27). The purpose of this chapter is not only to reclaim critical realist social philosophy for educational research, but also to reclaim reality from the positivist and statistical methodology that underpins School Effectiveness Research (SER) and to make clear the difference that realism makes by virtue of its critical explanatory power in unmasking the ideological nature of SER and its adoption by New Labour.

Introduction

In commenting upon New Labour's education policy, Gillborn and Youdell (2000:31) point to its technicist and deeply regressive nature (see also, *inter alia,* Angus 1993; Ball 1990; Gewirtz *et al.* 1995; Hill 1999; Morley and Rassool 1999; Scott 2000; Thrupp 1999; Willmott 1999a, 2000). They note that one of Labour's first 'innovations' was to establish within the Department for Education and Employment (DfEE) the Standards and Effectiveness Unit. The title is significant since the repetition of 'standards' underscores the continuity with Conservative discourse, but the second part–the effectiveness part–is equally important:

> The unit's head, Professor Michael Barber, is a leading writer on school effectiveness and improvement, a prominent and growing school of work that has attracted considerable controversy […] In particular, sociological critics have attacked the naïve basis of many studies that seek to identify (recipe-style) the elements that predispose a school towards being more or less 'effective'.
>
> (Gillborn and Youdell 2000:32)

Indeed, SER has been strongly criticised for its ideological congruence with New Labour's consolidation of New Right education policies enacted in the 1980s and 1990s. Goldstein and Woodhouse's (2000) recent contribution represents one of a small number of attempts by SE researchers to deny or play down the charge of ideological commitment and/or New Right association, while at the same time recognising the limitations of some of the research within the field itself. Such engagement with critics of school effectiveness is long overdue and welcome. However, it is argued here that the counter-critique remains fundamentally flawed. The charge of New Right ideological commitment is reiterated. It is argued that the positivism of the Office for Standards in Education (OFSTED), statistical modelling, the lack of theorising within SER and the generic espousal of pragmatism resonate strongly with–and contingently buttress–the individualist social ontology of neo-liberalism that underpinned the quasi-marketisation and commodification of education in England and Wales.[1]

Reynolds has admitted that '[s]chool effectiveness has sung the policymakers' tune in its emphasis upon how schools can make a difference–indeed we wrote their words' (1998:20). Yet, as Thrupp (2001) argues, nowhere in the SE counter-critiques can be found examples of SE researchers not just providing research support for, but actually implementing, the agendas of neo-liberal/managerialist governments in various roles around the globe. He notes that in the UK, for example, SER proponents are involved in developing, promoting and evaluating New Labour's educational reforms. Goldstein and Woodhouse are also cognisant of the quasi-umbilical relationship with past and present UK governments. In fact, they recommend that SER should rename itself as Educational Effectiveness precisely in order to separate SE research from government influence.

Furthermore, Teddlie *et al.* (2000:105–15) present growing reservations within the SE community about the use of multi-level modelling because of, *inter alia,* its excessive scientism, accompanied by a discussion of the modelling now required. In short, they argue that, ultimately, the high hopes held for multi-level modelling have not been realised. This is a welcome move away from Mortimore and Sammons' riposte to SE critics that 'the use of MLM [multi-level modelling] has enabled us to tease out the impact of a school on pupils with quite different educational backgrounds and to make the case on their behalf' (1997:185). Indeed, they concluded then that '[m]ore complex models are needed to reflect the complexity of the educational processes […] In general,

we seek to use a range of quantitative and qualitative methods' (1997:186–7). What is conspicuously absent here is any discussion of modelling's inherent lack of explanatory power to account for the complexity of educational processes and outcomes. There is no serious attempt to assess the extent to which statistical modelling adequately represents the complexity of social reality. SE researchers who adopt statistical methods do not ask what real objects and processes must be like for mathematical representations of them to be adequate. The emphasis on data–on how data are used, how much they should be used, how reliable they are, and so on–detracts from any exploration of social ontology and explanatory methodology. In other words, when problems are acknowledged, there is no exploration of the conceptual and metaphysical problems implicit in the use of statistics.

For Goldstein and Woodhouse, the issue is not about statistical modelling per se but about how well it is used by SE researchers:

> Statistical modelling, of course, is only as good as the data which it attempts to model. It is also often the case that such models oversimplify reality to the point of distorting it and producing misleading inferences. To point to specific inadequacies, however, or to list inappropriate uses of such models does not invalidate them *per se*. Statistical modelling of a complex kind can provide insights, and unexpected relationships.
>
> (2000:359)

This exemplifies my point about the primacy accorded to data, rather than to social ontology and explanatory methodology.[2] Goldstein and Woodhouse comment that

> the future health of SE research depends on a collective recognition by the community that all is not well; that there is a clear need to come to agreement on separating the good from the bad and that there is a need to move onto a sounder methodological basis, which among other things, will require the collection of different kinds of data. The SE community would also do well to be more receptive and less defensive about its critics, and to avoid the kinds of superficial responses we have discussed above. Likewise, there is a need for some critics to demonstrate a deeper understanding of SE research.
>
> (2000:360)

Indeed, the authors are concerned about 'the failure of the "qualitative" critics properly to understand the nature of quantitative techniques', which, they argue, 'is quite serious since these critics do have valid points whose force is often dissipated through lack of proper understandings of the nature and substance of quantitative models' (2000:359). The crucial issue here centres on the explanatory utility of statistical modelling. The issue for critics like myself is that the use of modelling as an aid to causal explanation is problematic since its language is

acausal and astructural. It is unable, among other things, to distinguish causal from accidental relations. Indeed, the concept of Variable', for example, is indifferent *vis-à-vis* causal explanation: variables can only register change, not its cause. The minute we start to ignore causal properties and powers it is easy to see why New Labour's educational policy-making can so readily argue for 'zero tolerance', since prior conditioning by structural and cultural properties is erased at a stroke (or held in abeyance).

This leads me to my final point. The neo-liberal restructuring of education presupposes a social ontology that is unstructured and undifferentiated. The argument for ideological commitment on the part of SE statisticians in particular derives from the contingent compatibility between the secreted social ontology of statistical methods and the atomistic social ontology of neo-liberalism. Let's be clear here: I am not suggesting that statistical modelling necessarily entails neo-liberalism. The argument is that the inability of statistics to distinguish between contingent and necessary relations and thus to incorporate the stratified nature of social reality resonates with the social ontology of neoliberalism. As Sayer puts it:

> The blindness of mathematics to internal relations and emergence encourages […] the belief that complex actions can be treated as reducible to some simple combination of simple behaviours which in turn are regular responses to set stimuli, as if each stimulus and action had the same meaning regardless of context.
>
> (1992:200)

Sayer's argument is that individualistic theories that portray society as a structureless aggregate of externally related individuals resonates more easily with the use of quantitative methods. Thus Goldstein and Woodhouse are correct to argue that statistical models 'certainly have no inbuilt requirement for any particular managerial structure' (2000:355), but they cannot see that they resonate strongly with the neo-liberal restructuring of education. The relationship is one of contingent compatibility, not necessary concomitance, between statistical methods and the New Managerialist/neo-liberal restructuring of education in England and Wales.

To be fair, Goldstein and Woodhouse are aware of the ideological usurpation of SE research by past Conservative and New Labour administrations. However, they do not accept the charge of New Right association. While their recognition of the role played by SER in New Labour's education policy is welcome, it is important to reiterate the charge of right-wing ideological commitment. New Labour's modernisation project; the growing emphasis upon 'what works'; the lack of theorising within SER; statistical modeling– all share the same social ontological bed, which denies the irreducibility of society to individuals. What Goldstein and Woodhouse have yet to acknowledge is that statistical modelling's implicit social ontology renders it susceptible to right-wing appropriation.

New Labour, New Right: the case of education

As Powell notes, it is possible 'to point to a number of areas where New Labour exhibits a large degree of policy continuity with the Conservatives, or is even going beyond the Conservatives' (1999:284). In the case of education, for many commentators New Right consolidation has occurred. The support that derives from SE research for neo-liberal and managerialist policies has been widely noted (Angus 1993; Dale 1992; Whitty *et al.* 1998; Lauder *et al.* 1998; Olssen 2000; Thrupp 1999; Willmott 1999b). However, the extent to which there is isomorphism between the New Right and New Labour is contested. As Clarke *et al.* (2000) note, much effort has already been spent on trying to identify the distinctive political configuration of New Labour, which has been dominated by questions of difference and continuity in relation to 'Old Labour' (or social democracy) and to the New Right (or Thatcherism and neoliberalism). However, in the case of education I would argue that there is isomorphism. As Morley and Rassool (1999) point out, while New Labour has reinserted the concept of disadvantage via the creation of Education Action Zones, the implicit assumption remains that such schools can perform independently of contextual constraints. This is consistent with the atomistic social ontology of OFSTED, much of the SE literature, and neo-liberalism, which in turn provides ideological legitimation for New Managerialism in education and concomitant work intensification.

As Fergusson succinctly puts it:

> On the face of it, New Labour in education, as in other spheres, has adopted wholesale most of the premises of neoliberalism, many of its objectives, and almost all of its methods of delivering them. Competition, choice and performance indicators remain the unchallenged totems of policy, not in overt policy statements but simply by being left unchallenged by New Labour reforms. Structurally, little that is fundamental is changing in the ways in which schools and colleges are run. Markets and managerialism hold sway […] Only the rhetoric of what schools and colleges can and should produce changes […] The point of difference [between New Right and New Labour] is not whether schools should be better, but which ones should be made better first.
>
> (2000:203)

I would add here that the imposition of baseline assessment and national targets represent an extension of neo-liberalism. Furthermore, Fergusson notes that New Labour's commitment to modernisation includes a supplementary set of priorities, namely the drive towards inclusionary policies, the idea of stake-holding and efforts to secure democratic renewal, which 'all assign a new priority to the social consequences of modernization, so long as they are accompanied by risk sharing and responsibilization' (2000:205). Inclusion here means adopting middle-class values and practices within an individualist and competitive framework. Equally,

'responsibilization' is individualist. As Fergusson rightly argues, parents are made implicitly responsible for their children's education, 'as the new discourse shifted the boundaries of where the state's responsibilities stopped, and parents' began' (2000:209).

Freeden (1999:44) argues that the ideological amalgam of New Labour includes liberal, conservative and socialist components as well as ideational additions from the US. For him, New Labour ideology is not identical with any one of the latter categories. He rightly argues that ideologies do not have to be grand narratives nor closed, doctrinaire and abstract systems. It would be useful here analytically to distinguish between ideas (or what Archer (1995) calls the 'Cultural System') and what people do with them (at the level of socio-cultural interaction). Ideas remain ideas until used or activated by social actors: it is the social *use* of specific ideas that may (or may not) be ideological. By analytically separating out ideas and their use, one can account for the contradictions that exemplify New Labour (and past Conservative) social policy. Thus, for example, while in the abstract (cultural systemic level) neo-liberal ideas disclaim the stratified nature of social reality, practically (at the sociocultural level) actual markets require institutions and organisations that are irreducible to individuals, as we shall see. Indeed, quintessential to New Right discourse is the out-and-out denigration of bureaucracy. As advocates of entrepreneurial governance often appear incapable of conceptualising public bureaux in anything other than negative terms, they cannot imagine what sort of positive role those bureaux might be performing' (DuGay 2000:67). The point here is that while bureaucracy may be inefficient and inhibit innovation it cannot be avoided. Both private and public organisations need a significant degree of bureaucratisation if they are to cope with large throughputs of information and material.

Ideology, Hayek and the nature of 'the market'

As Bhaskar (1989:87) argues, designating a set of ideas as 'ideology' is only justified if they can be explained as well as criticised, which involves being able to say why the ideas or beliefs concerned are false. This section provides the backdrop to the widespread acceptance of neo-liberal ideas, as propounded in particular by Hayek. It also provides an explanation of the falsity of neo-liberalism via transcendental argumentation. The ideology of the 'free' market is laid bare; this in turn enables the charge of ideological commitment against SER proponents developed in the next section, for the positivist impulse of the latter is contingently congruent: both positivism and neo-liberalism are transcendentally false and ideological.

Jonathan (1997) has argued convincingly that the populist appeal of the 'New Right' agenda for restructuring–or the quasi-marketisation of–education stems from the liberal promises of equality that were made following the 1944 Butler Act. She argues that recent New Right attacks on education tapped a reservoir of popular unease. Such unease was not unsurprising since, 'despite reformist measures over three decades, the post-war education project of individual

emancipation for each and simultaneous social progress for all had failed to deliver to many what they had hoped for from it' (Jonathan 1997:57). Indeed, it was the failure of Keynesian social democracy that resonated well with 'liberal' thinking that dates back further than the oil crisis. I have deliberately placed scare quotes around liberal, since neo-liberalism, while anchored in eighteenth-and nineteenth-century premisses about the danger of well-intentioned paternalism leading to authoritarian coercion, fails to engage with unresolved questions about the interdependence of agency in the social world. Thus, to Jonathan,

> nineteenth-century liberal niceties about the relation of the individual to the social are conspicuous by their absence in the pronouncements not only of politicians of New Right persuasion […] but also in some philosophical writing and in the exhortations of 'opinion-formers' in right-wing 'think-tanks'. The claim that neo-liberalism represents the eclipse of politics by economics may seem superficially surprising when apologists are typically keen to adopt the mantle and invoke the authority of the early liberals, but that invocation is seriously misleading
>
> (1997:48–9)

Part of the systematisation of the 'New Right' philosophy places a premium on a (potentially rewarding) search for congruent ideational items. Hence the selective use of ideational items from Mill, Hume, Smith *et al.* during the 1980s by such organisations as the Centre for Policy Studies, the Adam Smith Institute and the Institute for Economic Affairs. The Centre for Policy Studies was founded by Margaret Thatcher and Keith Joseph and quickly became a focus for the ideas of such right-wing thinkers as Milton Friedman and F.A. Hayek. The underlying theme for the ideas systematised by sections of the New Right was the alleged superiority of market mechanisms and the need for sound money. Such cultural embroidery was carried out against the backdrop of the Black Papers, of which the last was published in 1977.

> [Henceforth] the discursive cudgels of the conservative educational offensive were taken up by a variety of related and overlapping New Right agencies and groups […] What makes them markedly different from the rather informally produced Black Papers is the degree and sophistication of their organisation and strategies for dissemination […] By the 1980s […] neo-liberal texts, particularly the work of Hayek, and monetarist theories like those of Friedman, are paraded as a basis for social and economic policy making.
>
> (Ball 1990:34–5)

However, as Gamble (1988) notes, the call for the restoration of sound money has been the New Right's centrepiece and is the issue on which the New Right first made a major impact. Despite continuing disagreement about the nature of the economy, the widening of divisions between competing macro-economic

perspectives and the undermining of the theoretical underpinnings of monetarism, it was the marked deterioration in economic performance of the 1970s that accounts for the New Right's ascendancy. Monetarists argue, *inter alia,* that the control of inflation should be prioritised, irrespective of any increase in unemployment. New Right economics decries state intervention because it is held that administrative and bureaucratic structures are inherently inferior to markets as a means of allocating resources. With regard to public expenditure and taxation, New Right economists assert that market solutions would in every case be superior to the established public provision. At the same time, there evolved the contribution of 'public choice theory', which argued against the notion that public bodies are disinterested and enlightened, while putting forward the view that private individuals and companies are self-interested and avaricious. The argument here is that the pursuit of self-interest by private bodies is licensed by the existence of a competitive framework of rules that does not exist in the public sector. Consequently, many in the New Right concluded that 'markets were much superior to democracy in representing and aggregating individual choices. It was only a short step to arguing that democracy needed to be hedged around with restrictions to ensure that it did not permit encroachments upon the private sphere' (Gamble 1988:52).

Hayek's catallaxy: the denial of social structure

The key thinker of the neo-liberals is Hayek. The term 'neo-liberalism'–as has occurred with the generic 'New Right'–is employed as a portmanteau, which embraces Friedman's economic liberalism, Nozick's libertarianism (the advocacy of the minimal state) and Hayek's Austrian economics. Hayek lends support to the *sui generis* properties of the division of labour. He distinguishes between 'catallaxy' and 'economy'. His conception of economy is a restricted one, referring to clusters of economic activities that are organised for a specific purpose and have a unitary hierarchy of ends, in which knowledge of how to achieve ends is shared. A catallaxy, on the other hand, has no unitary hierarchy of ends, but a mass of innumerable economies without a specific purpose. As Hayek has famously pointed out, it is the product of spontaneous growth as opposed to design. One of Hayek's central arguments, *contra* state socialism, is that the catallaxy eludes regulation by central control. This is because of the extraordinary division of knowledge immanent in any advanced industrial economy. Thus the fundamental economic problem is not calculational but epistemological; namely, how to coordinate the actions of innumerable agents without the possibility of any adequate centralised knowledge of their needs and resources. Consequently, competition operates as a discovery procedure and the main role of markets is in generating information through the price mechanism as to how economic agents ignorant of each other may best attain their equally unknown purposes (Sayer 1995).

The salient point, then, is that the complex and evolutionary nature of the catallaxy renders its qualities unknowable to any single mind or organisation.

Hayek correctly takes to task the socialist vision of a collectively controlled and planned advanced economy–a 'fatal conceit', which he terms 'constructivism'. As Sayer (1995) points out, many Marxist positions have failed to acknowledge the fundamental difference between running a technical division of labour for producing a particular type of commodity and coordinating a social division of labour involving millions of different commodities, thousands of enterprises and billions of customers. This is not to license chaos, for although catallaxies are unplanned they are ordered. Yet, for Marx, the only good order 'must be the product of conscious collective purpose, a Hegelian legacy of humanity rising to consciousness and control over itself […] Marx is resistant not only to actions having bad unintended consequences, but to unintended consequences *per se*' (Sayer 1995:76). However, Hayek adopts the extreme counter-position to Marx. In brief, he reasons that because unintended consequences of actions are central to the functioning of catallaxies, one must not intervene. This is simply a non sequitur and, *inter alia,* excuses problems that can–and should–be confronted and assessed in the search for feasible alternatives. More crucially, Hayek denies that catallaxies possess emergent properties:

> Absent from Hayek's image of capitalism as an unimaginably complex mass of individuals responding to one another through markets is any notion of major social structures […] While modern societies and advanced economies are indeed catallaxies, they are also systems with grand structures.
>
> (Sayer 1995:77–8)

It is therefore unsurprising that the ontological erasure of relatively enduring social structures leads to an emphasis on 'the market' as a sphere of freedom. Yet a market encompasses not simply commodity exchanges and associated transfers of money, but also enduring organised practices that facilitate such exchanges on a regular basis. It is worth briefly discussing the different types of market and the multiple meanings of 'market'.

The nature of 'the market'

Essentially, makets differ according to the way in which transactions are organised, particularly with regard to pricing. 'Spot markets' are those in which prices are flexible and relationships between actors ephemeral. Spot markets approximate economic models. Yet most real markets do not fit this type of market. Instead, fixed prices provide a stable environment for calculating costs and organising production and distribution. Economic models tend to assume the universality of 'arm's-length contracting', whereby little information other than price is provided and buyer-supplier relationships are minimal. 'Relational contracting', by contrast, involves the sharing of information, the careful building of trust and collaboration between buyer and seller, before and after the transaction. However, neo-liberals wrongly contend that markets work best 'on the spot', at arm's length, and thus

discourage information sharing. Hayek *et al.* overestimate the sufficiency of price as a source of information for buyers and sellers in markets. Prior to commodity exchange, non-price information normally has to be exchanged and is usually provided at no extra cost to the buyer.

The New Right is well known for its trumpeting of the 'free' market, in which all that exists (or, rather, matters) are spontaneous exchanges between individuals who have something to sell. The operation of the state is thus regarded as disrupting this smooth-running, spontaneous gathering of free individuals. 'Yet far from being an unnecessary interference, the state is a normal feature of real markets, as a precondition of their existence. Markets depend on the state for regulation, protection of property rights, and the currency' (Sayer 1995:87). We will return to the subject of state regulation in more detail shortly. Suffice it to say, markets are not 'free', since their regulation does not benefit all. There are enduring structured power imbalances. However, Sayer points out that the conceptual slides endemic to employment of 'the market' are a feature of both lay and academic uses and are found in right/left-wing, liberal and economic theory. The Right proffer idealised models of markets as descriptions of de facto markets; the Left avoids any rigorous scrutiny of their properties. Sayer argues that concepts of markets differ according to: (a) their level of abstraction; (b) their inclusiveness; (c) whether they are couched within a 'market optic' or a 'production optic'; and (d) whether they refer to real or imaginary markets.

Real markets may be conceptualised at different levels of abstraction. One can talk about the local fruit-and-vegetable market concretely (who the sellers and buyers are, what is sold, and so on) or more abstractly, that is, in terms of the exchange of commodities and property rights for money or as a mode of coordination of the division of labour. At the same time, concepts of markets also differ in inclusiveness. Markets may be defined narrowly in terms of routinised buying and selling, or inclusively to cover the production and consumption of exchanged goods and the particular property relations involved. Restricted concepts exclude major contextual influences that explain behaviour. As Sayer puts it, '[t]he dynamism of capitalist economies is not simply a consequence of markets in the restricted sense, but of capital, obliged to accumulate in order to survive, and liberated from the ties which bind petty commodity producers' (1995:99). What is included on the Left is determined by a 'production optic', in which markets are marginalised. For the Right, what is included is determined by a 'market optic', whereby production is conflated with exchange. For our purposes, we are concerned with the 'market optic' of the Right. The market optic ignores production and its social relations. Indeed, in mainstream economics, the whole economy becomes the market (in the singular) and almost invariably counterposed to the state. The salient point here is that markets are not an alternative to production, firms or hierarchies (Sayer 1995:101); rather, they are a mode of coordination of the division of labour.

Furthermore, one can distinguish literal concepts that refer to real markets from those that refer to imaginary ones, and also from those that use market

metaphors that have limited similarity to real markets. As Sayer argues, it is not the level of abstraction used in metaphorical approaches that is important; rather, it is their quality. Indeed, what is often lost is the social relations that underpin real markets.

The transcendental argument

Transcendentally, the neo-liberal social ontology cannot be sustained: market exchange requires state involvement. The corollary is that the existence of schooling is equally necessary. Given that the market is not 'free', and is necessarily subject to some form of institutional regulation, then

> deregulated governance of education loses its justification, and the [neo-liberal] project loses its rationale even on its own terms […] If this line of reasoning can be sustained when elaborated, it would provide a transcendental argument against the existence of principles of free-market exchange in the governance and distribution of education […] Furthermore, if neo-liberal principles can be shown to be incompatible with the governance of that social practice without whose alignment no vision for the ordering of society can be realised, then the vision itself is called into question, not only on grounds of equity […] but on grounds of coherence.
>
> (Jonathan 1997:25–6)

There are two distinct issues to consider here. Firstly, there is the transcendental argument that markets—or Hayek's catallaxy—are regulated by institutions that are irreducible to individuals. Secondly, there is Jonathan's argument that the very institutions that underpin market relationships themselves require an educated workforce, in turn negating the neo-liberal project of subjecting the education system to market disciplinary mechanisms. Put simply, the rationale behind the neoliberal marketisation of the education system ultimately precludes the possibility of market activity. Moreover, neo-liberals themselves are unable to avoid the fact that the education system is state run and did not appear out of thin air. The argument for reconcilability is centred on the short-term need for the state to establish the conditions for a market-based education system. Yet the fact that the state has to regulate belies the neo-liberals' atomistic social ontology that is central to the argument for state non-intervention. The fact that the neo-liberal elements of the 1988 Education Reform Act deny the need for state intervention has serious implications for headteachers and their staff in terms of what is to be taught, how it is to be taught and under what conditions of service (*inter alia* demanding more for less as schools become subject to the discipline of quasi-market mechanisms).

Crucially, however, the devolution of control to individual schools contradicted the neo-liberal corpus since such devolution was done at the behest of central government. Any argument which claims that such centralised control was intended to be ephemeral, a necessary prelude to complete deregulation,

simply conceals the contradiction: the need for state control remains while we have an education system. The Hayekian approach disclaims the need for any form of planning, partly because of its state socialist connotations. Consequently, Local Education Authority (LEA) plans for limiting the number of children per school were dismissed out of hand and instead replaced by Local Management of Schools (LMS) funding arrangements, whereby schools were funded on a per capita basis and empowered to recruit as many pupils as practicable via open enrolment. But markets can never be a complete alternative to planning and hierarchy. The Hillgate Group's idea of providing vouchers for parents, if implemented on a wide scale, would itself have required significant planning. Moreover, such planning would have been expensive and not as efficient as the LEA system.

Statistical methods, positivism and ideological commitment

The above section has provided the transcendental grounds for the claim that the neo-liberal rationale behind the quasi-marketisation of the education system is untenable. In so doing, it has also elaborated the variety of definitions of 'the market' and how the 'market optic' of the neo-liberals denies the irreducibility of social structure. The charge of ideological commitment derives from the concealment of the transcendental necessity of *sui generis* structures that delimit agential action. In other words, the implicit denial of structural properties enables SER proponents and New Labour to assume that *all* schools can perform well independently of contextual constraints, in turn creating the work overload and stress that has been reported among the teaching profession. As Scott puts it, '[w]hat is at issue in short is that a method from within a positivist/empiricist framework […] cannot help but provide support for an agenda which emphasizes control, prediction and the rejection of a holistic view of education' (2000:70). The argument of this section is that the statistical methods and the generic positivism of SER lend themselves to individualistic social philosophies and policies. Indeed, as Thrupp (2001) rightly argues, critics of SER are not concerned with the technical issues in statistical modelling: the issue is whether modelling is able to capture the school processes it is expected to measure. The fact that modelling lacks explanatory power and cannot measure such processes should encourage SE statisticians and users of such statistics to reassess their role as educational researchers and reflect upon the untrammelled ease with which New Right policies appropriate their findings.

As we have seen in the introduction, Goldstein and Woodhouse are concerned about the failure of some critics to understand fully the nature of quantitative techniques. They argue that the power of multi-level modelling can only be realized once 'quality' data have been obtained. Yet we are not told which data and why? The debate is (again) played out at the level of methodology. SE researchers need to move beyond the level of methodology and engage with the priority of ontology Any methodology presupposes a social ontology, implicitly or explicitly. Thrupp

(2001) notes that 'SER's generally offhand approach to its critics may be especially unfortunate if proponents and critics of SER are often talking past each other as a result of different epistemological commitments as Willmott (1999) has argued'. This is indubitable. However, the principal argument of my article concerned ontology, that is, the secreted social ontology of positivist/statistical methods and its contingent congruence with neo-liberalism.

For Goldstein and Woodhouse, however,

> Perhaps the most extreme criticism of the use of [mathematical] models comes from Willmott, who mounts a general attack on 'positivism'. The difficulty with this critique is that it is very difficult to recognize any real researchers as practising positivists–at least according to Willmott's definition. For example, he asserts that positivism is unable to take account of subtle variations of social relationships within institutions over time, yet there are many studies which do model changing relationships of various kinds over time–the main problem being with the availability of the data rather than with the technical procedures required to do the modelling.
>
> (2000:359)

The last comment is instructive, since the authors remain firmly wedded to mathematical modelling. They do not acknowledge that precisely because they remain wedded to mathematical modelling they are positivists: mathematical modelling *cannot* take account of subtle variations of social relationships over time. But let's be clear about what we mean by positivism. Positivism is a theory of the nature and limits of knowledge. Bhaskar describes it as follows:

> Particular knowledge is of events sensed in perception; general knowledge is of the patterns such events show in space and over time, which, if it is to be possible, must be *constant* […] Sense-perception exhausts the possible objects of knowledge […] Positivism is a theory of *knowledge*. But any theory of knowledge presupposes an *ontology* […] Thus the Humean theory, which forms the lynchpin of the positivist system, presupposes an ontology of closed systems and atomistic events […] Moreover any theory of knowledge presupposes a *sociology* in the sense that it must be assumed, implicitly if not explicitly, that the nature of human beings and the institutions they reproduce or transform is such that such knowledge could be produced. Thus the Humean theory presupposes a conception of people as passive sensors of given facts and recorders of their given constant conjunctions, which has the corollary that knowledge can always be analysed in a purely individualistic way.
>
> (1989:49–50)

Bhaskar then argues that it is in the resulting inconsistent system that positivism's tremendous versatility and flexibility as an ideology lies. It functions as an ideology for social practices other than science 'by encouraging, by injunction or resonance,

certain substantive conceptions of the nature of nature, society, persons and their interconnections' (1989:50).

Indeed, as we shall see in a moment, Goldstein and Woodhouse want to incorporate–inconsistently–the fact that schools function within a social and political system, and at the same time retain the primacy of statistical modelling. Ultimately, then, this means that they cannot avoid the denial of social reality qua structured and open system that is intrinsic to mathematical modelling. In brief, there are two conditions that must be met for a closed system to exist. Firstly, there is the intrinsic condition for closure; that is, there must be no change or qualitative variation in the object possessing causal powers if mechanisms are to operate consistently. Secondly, the relationship between the causal mechanism and those of its external conditions must be constant if the outcome is to be regular (the extrinsic condition for closure). As Sayer (1992) points out, the intrinsic condition for closure is ignored even if the extrinsic one is acknowledged. Moreover,

> [t]he presence of uninterpreted constants, parameters or coefficients in many models bears witness to the inadequacy of their attempts to produce a correspondence between mathematical and causal order. If they cannot be interpreted as 'standing for' a particular process or characteristic they may more justifiably be described as 'fudge factors' in that their only function is to conceal the inadequacies of the model by providing a means of fitting it to any data set. (With enough parameters, *any* model can be fitted to any data.) […] Modellers may not be aware of it, but the inclusion of parameters whose values vary from case to case provides a retrospective but uninterpretable way of allowing for the non-satisfaction of the intrinsic and extrinsic conditions for closure and the mis-specification of causal structure.
>
> (Sayer 1992:184–5)

The transcendentally false assumption that social reality is a closed system is congruent with the OFSTED inspection regime, which is underpinned by SER. OFSTED assumes that learning outcomes can be linked directly and unambiguously to inputs (viz. teaching). Indeed, the tacit OFSTED assumption here is that causal factors are independent, universal and additive; that is, they do not interfere with each other and are uninfluenced by their contexts. The ideological import is palpable: teachers are blamed for pupil 'failure' (in other words, poor examination results). Furthermore, the key determinants (later reworked as key 'factors') that in OFSTED's view constitute 'effective' schools are culled at the level of observable events and in positivist fashion there is no attempt to differentiate between contingency and necessity Indeed, the (eleven) factors are viewed as *correlates* of effective schools. The idea that there may be a contingent relation between successful learning and strong leadership cannot be entertained. Here, then, we return to the perennial problem of spurious correlations that haunts the use of statistics because of its inability to distinguish accidental from necessary relations. Thus, for Hopkins, '[t]he so-called "effectiveness

correlates" however sophisticatedly defined are no substitute for models or theories of how schools function. Without this knowledge it is difficult to see how the [SE] field can progress' (1996:30).

Again, the main problem is that statistical modelling cannot deal with components that are not qualitatively invariant (for example, children and teachers) or where they interact causally with one another, or where emergent powers rise or are dissolved through combinations and separations. As Sayer succinctly puts it, '[a]ttempting to explain the effects of an object which has emergent powers in terms of the relative contribution of its constituents is like attributing a certain percentage of behaviour of water to hydrogen effects and the rest to oxygen effects!' (1992:181). Thus, we would not explain why students attend lectures in terms of attributing a certain percentage of their behaviour to lecturer effects and the rest to student effects. Instead, we employ such explanatory concepts as social structure–in this case, the irreducible emergent structural property of lecturer/student together with its wider structural embedding (university, polity and economy, and the necessary irreducible relations between them). We can count how many students turn up to lectures, but this does not tell us why. Similarly, SER may tell us how many students from working-class backgrounds gain A*-C GCSE passes but it does not tell us how and why. And although SER may also tell us that certain schools achieve better results for their working-class students, thereby indicating their 'value-addedness', it does not tell us why. This explains why such results become so easily appropriated by New Right government(s), since it is a short step to argue that *all* schools can achieve high levels of attainment, irrespective of social background. Without adequate explanation (or even attempts at explanation), SE data are ever open to political manipulation. One might reasonably expect an exploration of the material limits to the crude indicators of effectiveness currently imposed. Statistical techniques do not exist in abstract isolation: the socio-political context must always be taken into account, theoretically and ethically–and not as a mere afterthought exemplified by the belated recognition of the importance of social class, which is then statistically controlled for (Willmott 1999b).

Ironically, as Goldstein and Woodhouse call for more sophisticated models and 'data', Sayer (1992) argues that the value of statistics is depreciated as our knowledge of causal mechanisms becomes more complete. However, he does argue that the usefulness of statistical methods depends crucially upon the type of objects to which they are applied and the type of research design in which they are employed. In a nutshell, an evaluation of the possibilities of statistical analysis requires a non-statistical examination of the objects of interest: such an examination is conspicuously absent in the existing SE research concerned with mathematical modelling. A common criticism of statistical analyses of relationships among variables is that they tend to abstract from qualitative change in their key objects and from changes in context; often the two are linked and internally related (Sayer 1992:198). By way of an example, Sayer cites industrial change as an area of study in which students have for many years abstracted from the continually changing interdependence between the qualitative nature

of particular industries and the competitive environment in which they operate, as if the external variables were only externally related and as if the economic environment were just a passive backcloth to the action. This type of analysis has also characterised SE and School Improvement (SI) research. As Goldstein and Woodhouse note:

> Schools function within a social and political system which has its own structures and processes, whether these be one of inter-school competition or those determined by externally imposed constraints of curriculum or resource. Despite the recognition of this by many within SE and SI […] there seems little in the research itself that seriously attempts to address this problem. While SE research has gone some way towards modelling withinschool complexities, it has made almost no attempt to contextualise schools within the wider environment. To do so, of course, would involve political as well as social and cultural considerations and it is doubtful whether this would be welcome to government.
>
> (2000:356)

Here we have, on the one hand, a welcome discussion of the importance of the structures and processes that shape what goes on in schools and the recognition of the government's likely disapprobation of research that incorporates the latter, yet, on the other hand, the need for contextualisation is reductively couched in terms of modelling. There is a crucial recognition of the need to contextualise the environment in which schools function, yet immediately we are returned to the familiar territory of mathematical modelling. There is no discussion of the materiality of political and social systems, and of the necessary internal relation between schools, the state and the economy, and how the economy cannot sensibly be statistically represented. Statistically minded SE researchers should take on board the fact that mathematical models assume a closed system (see above). People and their social environments are not externally related and susceptible to treatment as Variables'.

Finally, I wish to reiterate the contingent relationship that exists between statistical methods and the New Right in the context of education. As I have already argued, Goldstein and Woodhouse are quite right to insist that statistical methods have no in-built requirement for a particular managerial structure. However, such methods do not exist in abstract isolation. As Thrupp (2001) rightly notes, the in-house concerns of SE proponents do not run as deep as those of their critics because they see the problem mostly as a matter of encouraging a more satisfactory use of their findings by politicians rather than acknowledging the current managerialist climate. Goldstein and Woodhouse argue that much of what we know about the effects of class is derived from careful statistical modelling. Yet the crucial point is that 'careful statistical modelling' can never explain what is registered statistically. One must be careful not to elide explanation and effects. Indeed, it must be remembered that managerialist structures have been imposed and underpinned by the quantitative data supplied by SE researchers. Providing

statistical 'evidence' of the effects of class does not tell us whether class itself places limits on educational achievement. An examination of this question should involve rigorous analysis of the nature, dynamics and causal properties of class. This is why the atheoretical nature of statistics readily lends itself to neo-liberal appropriation. While Goldstein and Woodhouse *et al.* explicitly discuss the issue of class, statistical methods cannot adequately incorporate it and thus any statistical findings should only be used as a tentative starting point.[3]

Lack of theorising within the SE movement

SE research has long been taken to task for lacking a theoretical base; indeed, this criticism is now accepted by SE proponents. Lauder *et al.* (1998) rightly point out that the early SE literature was predicated upon notions of ethos and climate in order to lay claim to a 'theoretical' basis for its research. Goldstein and Woodhouse acknowledge this point; however, instructively they also argue that

> [i]t is not incumbent upon every research endeavour to provide a strong theoretical basis of the kind that allows interesting predictions and shapes our interpretation of the world being studied. There is, for example, often an important period during which empirical evidence needs to be accumulated before coherent theories can be developed. Naturally, such empirical accumulation makes particular theoretical assumptions about the phenomena it studies, but these can be general ones already in use rather than specific ones that attach exclusively to the particular field of enquiry […] The choice of framework will itself determine the nature of any inferences which are drawn, and different frameworks can lead to real or apparent conflicts. It is important to appreciate this, since there is a notable lack in the current school effectiveness literature of serious attempts to expose underlying assumptions that the research is making.
>
> (2000:360)

The above is contradictory and confusing. Firstly, Goldstein and Woodhouse conceive of theory, in positivist fashion, in terms of prediction. For predictions give us grounds for expecting something to happen, while causal explanations tell us what makes things happen. Crucially, causal explanations can only serve as grounds for reliable predictions under special conditions–and such conditions are not generally found in social science. For social realists theory is about (fallible) explanation of matters social. Prediction and explanation are mutually exclusive: there is no 'middle ground'.

Secondly, the authors argue that it is not incumbent upon every researcher to provide a strong theoretical basis yet acknowledge at the same time that empirical accumulation makes particular theoretical assumptions. The logic is far from impeccable here. I would suggest that the tension above derives from the atheoretical nature of statistics, whose non-explanatory make-up resonates with

individualist theories, which Goldstein and Woodhouse want to avoid. However, it is argued, rightly, that the choice of framework determines the nature of any inferences that are drawn. In other words, while in any field of study the nature of what exists cannot be unrelated to how it is studied, what is held to exist shapes considerations about how it should be explained. As Archer (1998) rightly argues, social ontology plays a regulative role *vis-à-vis* the explanatory methodology for the reason that it conceptualises social reality in certain terms. Conversely, regulation is mutual, since what is held to exist cannot remain immune from what does exist. As Archer puts it,'[s]uch consistency is a general requirement and it usually requires continuous two-way adjustment between ontology and methodology to achieve and sustain it as such' (1998:17). In the case of Goldstein and Woodhouse, the nature of social reality has led to a re-examination of previous assumptions, in particular the incorporation of social class and the acknowledgement of socio-political systems. However, the fact remains that statistical methods retain their primacy, thereby undercutting the ontological basis of the (belated) incorporation of social class.

Archer (1998) argues that the constituent elements of social theorising are threefold, that none is dispensable and that each exerts a regulatory role on the other, as follows:

social ontology → explanatory methodology → practical social theory

Statistical methods and modelling dispense with all three elements, yet in practice they cannot avoid making implicit ontological assumptions. However, this does not mean that any social ontology can be added on: precisely because statistical methods cannot deal in any meaningful sense with the stratified nature of social reality means that individualistic theories or ontological underpinnings are its 'natural' territory. SE statisticians need to recognise the severe explanatory limits of their tools and to put their sociopolitical (ontological) cards on the table, so to speak.

Concluding remarks

This chapter has reiterated the charge of ideological commitment against SE statisticians. The warrant to do so derives from the contingent compatibility between the unstructured, flat social ontology of neo-liberalism, which underpinned the restructuring of education in England and Wales, and the inability of statistical methods to acknowledge the stratified nature of social reality. It is because SE statisticians continue to deny the charge of association with the New Right that considerable time has been devoted to spelling out the nature of neo-liberalism, its transcendental untenability and the transcendental social realist alternative of ontological stratification. It is indeed welcome that SE mathematical modellers are attempting to distance themselves from government influence. However, they have yet to acknowledge the fact that statistical data are derived from sociopolitical contexts that their models cannot explain, which in turn makes

the data susceptible to abuse by government. I would suggest that the primacy given to modelling and statistics in some SER quarters be greatly attenuated in favour of theorising about the nature of schooling and society and, concomitantly, the material limits to 'improvement'.

Notes

1 It is important to explain the realist social ontology adopted in this chapter at the outset, for it provides the basis for the charge of ideological commitment made against neo-liberalism and SER. In brief, transcendental realism is committed to what social reality must be like in order to make analysis of it intelligible. In other words, it makes claims as to its necessary conditions that make it a possible object of knowledge. Transcendental social realism does not make claims as to which structures constitute social reality, but that it is structured, that is possesses *sui generis* enduring relations. The unobservable nature of irreducible social relations (for example, between teacher and pupil) lies at the heart of the realist conception of social structure. Structure is viewed neither as an aggregate of individuals nor as an observable regular pattern of events. It is not held to be independent of agency; rather, it is maintained that structure is an emergent property that is *sui generis* real by virtue of its relational nature. A teacher presupposes a pupil (or pupils), a head presupposes teachers, a governing body presupposes teachers, pupils, heads and administrative staff, and so on. Thus, we are talking about internal relations between roles, which are ontologically distinct from the individual people who fill them and whom they causally affect. The teacher-pupil internal necessary relation is an irreducible emergent property because the powers deposited within the roles modify the powers of the individuals as individuals. A lecturer cannot self-award a first-class honours degree just as a student cannot revoke the decision of a degree classification board: such powers do not reside in the properties of individuals but reside in the social relations that presuppose such individuals for their enduring efficacy (and hence mediation) (Willmott 1999a).

2 This applies equally to Mortimore and Sammons, who, in a response to charges of ideological commitment, have argued: '[h]ow can anyone who understands research methodology […] make such an unfair accusation?' (1997:185). What such SER exponents consistently eschew is an exploration and/or defence of the implicit social ontology that ineluctably underpins their methodological commitments. See Willmott (1999b) for a fuller discussion.

3 In relation to social background and educational performance, Sayer notes that one may be tempted to interpret the subject from the start as involving questions about possible generalisations and quantifiable formal relations:

> 'How does educational performance *vary with* social background?' As soon as this question is posed in this way we tend to opt without further ado for a quantitative analysis. From then, the next major decision involves choosing 'variables', 'factors' or 'indicators' for which there are data […] But it is also possible, though more difficult, to think of such issues causally, in terms of the processes and mediations by which membership of a particular social class, a particular type of educational institution and particular economic circumstances affects attitudes to education, etc. This could be incorporated with empirical study of *concrete* instances of the relationship.
>
> (Sayer 1992:202)

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8 What race means to realists

Bob Carter

Introduction

The question of whether realism makes a difference goes directly to the heart of a number of issues that have been debated widely and warmly in recent years. Most often these issues have had to do with notions of relativism, rationality, science and objectivity. Hacking (1999) refers to such notions as 'escalator words'; they raise the stakes in any argument, sending protagonists scuttling to well-entrenched reserve positions from where they can safely defend their core beliefs. As far as possible, I shall endeavour to avoid the escalator: rather than rush upwards towards the big confrontations, my aim is to identify some of the potential benefits for social researchers of adopting what I have referred to elsewhere as a modest realism (Carter 2000).

In order to facilitate my escalator-avoidance strategy, I propose to draw attention to these benefits not by offering a defence of realism as a theoretical or philosophical position–others have done this much more ably than myself (see, for example, Archer 1995; Bhaskar 1979; Devitt 1984; Harré 1986; Nagel 1986; Norris 1996; Outhwaite 1987; Sayer 1994; Trigg 2000)–but by suggesting ways in which a realist approach might be applied to sociological accounts of racism. In pursuing this strategy, I shall outline some key elements of a sociological realism and demonstrate to those either unpersuaded by realism, or sceptical of its relevance to social research, that it can lay the basis for a distinctive methodological programme. Finally, I also think that a distinctively sociological realism of the sort developed here offers certain advantages should one choose to take the escalator.

Realism, ontology and methodology

The structure–agency debate has been a focus of sociological attention since the origins of the social sciences took shape in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. The debate has received steadier and more consistent attention since the 1950s and 1960s. More recently, some, like Giddens, claim to have transcended it; others, such as Delanty, have declared it moribund (Delanty 1997; Giddens 1979, 1984). These claims notwithstanding, the central theme of the debate–broadly speaking, the relation between what people are enabled to do, or are inhibited from doing, by the social and material conditions in which they are historically located–remains a vexed one for those investigating the social world. In this

chapter I will suggest how a realist ontology of emergent properties might resolve the structure-agency problem and how such an ontology can be of practical methodological use.

The insistence that the world is not our world, that it is independent of, in the sense that it is irreducible to, any *particular* form of human understanding and action, provides the starting point for sociological realism. As particular individuals, we confront a world that is not directly produced or constructed by us, but is rather the complex outcome of the interactions between structural contexts and ourselves. Social relations and structures may thus be regarded as emergent properties of social interaction. They are activity-dependent in the past tense, as the structures and relations that condition agency in the present are created by the actions of those in the past. It is the outcomes of these actions that provide the enablements and constraints that individuals in the present confront.

Structure and agents may be analytically distinguishable in this way, but in actuality both are intertwined: individuals always act in some social context. Study of the social world therefore requires a methodological approach able to grasp analytically the distinction between agency and structure. Archer refers to this approach as 'analytical dualism'. The methodological advantage of analytical dualism is that it makes possible the study of how prior structures condition agents, and how agency modifies structures although structures may resist reformation. This temporal model of research Archer has termed 'morphogenetic'.

The morphogenetic model works in terms of three-part cycles. These cycles consist of (a) structural conditioning, whereby a given structure conditions but does not determine (b) social interaction. Social interaction arises from actions oriented towards the realisation of interests and needs emanating from current agents, and leads to (c) either structural elaboration or modification; that is, continuity or change.

Culture, agency and ideas of race

An example of the methodological advantages to be gained from the realist approach outlined above can be illustrated by examining concepts of race and their employment in sociological research. Briefly, the term *race* has an indeterminate status within social research. I do not mean this in the straightforward sense that sociologists disagree about what it means. They may (and frequently do) disagree about how concepts such as social class or gender may be defined, but usually within a more general (realist) recognition that these are theoretical notions intended to refer to, or describe, aspects of real-world phenomena such as the distribution of wealth or the systematic reproduction of inequalities.

This is not the case with concepts of race. On the one hand, the credibility of the natural scientific notion of races as naturally existing biological groupings has been challenged since at least the 1930s. Even where this notion has retained some favour–usually as a means of describing systematic hereditable difference among subspecies–it is in contexts where its irrelevance for interpreting social

and political differences is made unequivocally clear (Jones 1997). On the other hand, critiques of race concepts from within sociology, accelerated by the post-modern emphasis on reflexivity and the 'linguistic turn', have drawn attention to their contested, symbolic nature (see, for example, Gilroy 1993; Hall; 1992; Smaje 1997). Taken together, these two developments raise doubts about the theoretical status of a concept of race and its appropriateness for sociological analysis.

Consequently, few contemporary social scientists would wish to defend the scientific view of race as a category describing significant genotypical or phenotypical variation among human populations or, more simply, aver a belief in the existence of biological races. Indeed, it is not uncommon now for writers to preface their accounts of 'race and whatever' with an explicit disavowal of their commitment to a belief in actually existing races, rather as cigarette manufacturers warn consumers about the dangers of smoking. I want to explore briefly two ways in which sociologists have defied the health warnings and continued to use race in public places: by defending it as a meaningful interpretive category employed by social actors; and by regarding it as a discursive formation.

In their popular text *Introduction to Race Relations* (published in its second edition in 1990) Cashmore and Troyna discuss the term 'race'. After acknowledging the force of the scientific critique outlined earlier, they go on to note that 'the belief in race has been–and still is–a powerful force', arguing that 'race is real […] for, if people recognise that race exists […] it is real' (Cashmore and Troyna 1990:32). From the prosaic observation that many people continue to believe in the existence of races we arrive at a sociology based not on the equally prosaic claim that, therefore, the *belief* in races is real, but on an altogether different claim that, therefore, 'race' is real.

The problem with this is that once we stop talking about beliefs in a notion of race and instead talk about a reified something called race, structures of discrimination, and exclusionary practices generally, become the effect of the beliefs held by individuals about race. Social relations are thus reduced to people's conscious understandings of them–race relations are those relations understood by individuals in race terms (would we define class relations as merely those relations understood by actors in class terms?).

This makes it difficult to explore the interplay between race ideas and discriminatory practices. Are all discriminatory outcomes the effects of beliefs held by individuals about race? Which individuals? If discriminatory outcomes are the effects of beliefs, how do we account for the beliefs? The important distinction between structure (systemically reproduced, anterior distributions of material and cultural resources, including institutional roles and settings) and agency (the actual interactions between real individuals) is here seriously weakened.

In contrast to the experiential empiricism of this approach, postmodernists have sought to sidestep debates about the referential character of a concept of race by referring to 'race' as a discourse. On the face of it this appears to be an appealing strategy. The old debates about whether races can be held to exist can be put aside, and we can get on with exploring the discursive construction of race ideas in different social and political settings. Despite the 'postmodern' gloss,

however, I want to suggest that the 'race ideas as discourse' line runs into similar problems and reproduces similar shortcomings to the 'race ideas as everyday categories' line. And this is because it uses the notion of race in very much the same way.

For example, Afshar and Maynard (1994) define 'race' as an ascriptive category that is socially constructed and temporally, spatially and culturally specific. Now, to argue that you want to retain a notion of race to refer to those instances where social actors choose affirmatively to identify themselves in terms of race ideas is possibly defensible, though not comfortably so (is Nazism affirmation? Is it a race phenomenon in the sense that Rastafarianism might be viewed as a race phenomenon?). Nevertheless, the race concept is swiftly put to task beyond this. The authors talk of 'racial dynamics' and 'racial domination' (why not racist dynamics and racist domination, since a self-chosen category of affirmation can hardly generate dynamics and domination?). Later in the same volume Maynard poses the question of how 'race' and gender interact (Maynard 1994:12), but on her earlier definition it is difficult to see exactly what this means other than how understanding oneself in race terms might affect, and be affected by, one's gender.

We find a similar tangle in the work of Omi and Winant (1994). The focus of their popular text is 'how concepts of race are created and changed, how they became the focus of political conflict, and how they have come to permeate US society' (1994: vii). They go on to reinforce this point, arguing that 'race is a concept which signifies and symbolises social conflicts and interests by referring to different types of human bodies' (1994:55). It is unquestionably then a social construct: races are imagined communities. Yet it is a social construct capable of cutting across class lines as well as dividing classes internally (1994:32), with its own dynamics which 'must be understood as determinants of class relationships and indeed class identities, not as mere consequences of these relationships' (1994:34). Once more, a category (possibly) appropriate to the interpretation of certain sorts of agency in certain sorts of circumstances 'moonlights' as a causally efficacious structural feature of contemporary societies.

An alternative–realist–account might begin from the recognition that ideas about race *as* ideas are items within a cultural realm that is itself independent of any particular standpoint. I am using ideas here in a loose sense to refer to representations, folk beliefs, propositions, imaginings. Ideas are the emergent products of the engagement of human consciousness with the world. Once embodied in a symbolic code of some sort–a written text, a musical notation, a plastic form–ideas attain an independence from their originators and become occupants of what Popper referred to as 'World Three' (Popper 1972).

Popper's notion of 'World Three' refers specifically to natural science theories. Archer (1989, 1995) has extended the applicability of this concept to the broader realm of all conceptual schemes and belief systems. She refers to 'World Three' as 'cultural emergent properties' (or CEPs), with material structures being 'structural emergent properties' (or SEPs). As emergent properties, CEPs (such as religion) are not reducible to the level of individuals, and so may be open to contested interpretations by different groups with different material (SEP) interests.

Theories, ideas and conjectures can be postulated as relatively independent entities with contingent or necessary logical interconnections, and this allows several advances, especially in an account of race ideas. Firstly, it encourages a view of theories as having logical relations with other theories on the basis of the propositional claims they make. It is logically impossible, for example, to base a credible atheism on a belief in God. Such relations are separate from the question of individual belief, and of the reasons why, and to what extent, actors hold particular ideas. This is why it is rarely possible to make race theories vanish by demonstrating their falsity to specific individuals, as CEPs are ontologically distinct from the individuals who may adhere to them. So, individuals' beliefs will be derived from CEPs, and insofar as they adhere to these, individuals will find their ideational choices shaped by the effects of the logical relations between such beliefs and those offered by other CEPs. Such relations do not of course determine actions; they are merely conditions that actors have to take into account if they seek to uphold the belief in question.

Secondly, as propositions about the world, race ideas are as vulnerable to criticism as any other description of social reality that proposes certain things to be the case. Such criticisms will have all sorts of intended and unintended consequences. Thus, the efforts of Victorian scientists to found a notion of race scientifically led to the emergence of a scientific critique of race ideas, as scientists found it unexpectedly difficult to ground race ideas in science (Banton 1997; Barkan 1991). Over the last decade or so less attention has been paid to the propositional forms of race ideas, and the distinctions between, say, anti-semitism, anti-colour racism or anti-Irish racism, because of the focus in much contemporary discussion on race as a generic object. The discursive force of race, rather than the actual content of the ideas as such, has become the central concern of theorists. Partly this has to do with the realisation, noted above, that the rational criticism of racist propositions is usually insufficient to bring about a change of conviction (although I think this insufficiency is sometimes exaggerated). More significant, though, has been the conflation of race ideas with a notion of *race,* and the corresponding failure to distinguish between culture as 'World Three' (comprised of CEPs) and how, in what ways and for what purposes people seek to engage with the cultural resources available to them, in relation to their vested interests, understood in relation to the prevailing SEPs. The interplay between CEPs, SEPs and agency is thus obscured.

Structure and agency

Let me illustrate the above claims with an example. The revival of the British economy after 1945 depended crucially on expanded production. Expanding production meant, in the conditions of the immediate postwar period, an increase in the size of the working population. This became a crucial structural condition within which British policy-makers had to operate and which constrained them in particular ways by making certain courses of action advantageous for some groups and, conversely, disadvantageous for others. Moreover, this emergent

feature of the postwar world interacted with another: the promise of reform expressed in the comprehensive electoral victory of the Labour Party. Labour leaders thus found themselves constrained by political commitments to a national health service, the raising of the school leaving age and the nationalisation of major industries.

Furthermore, these commitments had to be reconciled with a foreign policy based squarely on the notion of the British Empire as a source of political authority. Retaining colonial possessions required the maintenance of a military presence and thus entailed the continuation of conscription. Emerging from the relations between these emergent relations was the central structural condition of labour shortage. Rapid economic growth represented the Government's best chance of being able to resolve the pressures of these conflicting structural conditions. Such growth required an increase in the size of the working population but such an increase could not readily be sourced from within the indigenous population for the above reasons. Inexorably the Government was driven towards the only other option: the recruitment of labour from outside the boundaries of the nation-state.

However, as a direct consequence of the labour shortage in Britain, migration to the 'Mother Country' became an attractive proposition for British subjects in the Colonies. Faced with poor prospects of employment in the Caribbean, and frequently prepared by experience of British life from wartime service, small numbers of migrants began to arrive in 1947 and 1948. As British subjects (and later, following the 1948 British Nationality Act, as Citizens of the UK and Colonies) they were able freely to enter, work and settle in the UK. This might have been regarded (and was in some quarters) as a fortuitous resolution to the problems of economic recovery and labour shortage. Yet for some senior members of the Government the colour and colonial status of the migrants activated acute ideational conflicts. The most thorny of these arose from the incompatibility between the formal public commitment by politicians to the notion of a 'multi-racial' Commonwealth, in which all British subjects enjoyed equal rights, and the claim that the colour and colonial status of particular subjects rendered them 'unassimilable' with British society. Put simply, on the one hand all British subjects were seen as equal in their entitlement to live and work in the UK; on the other hand, however, certain British subjects were regarded as unlikely to 'fit in' and therefore should be prevented from exercising this entitlement. Thus, we begin to see a particular interplay developing between culture and agency, in which ideas and theories, or at least the logical relations between their propositional forms, begin to exert a directional guidance through the generation of specific situational logics.

In the present example, successive Cabinets throughout the 1950s eschewed the open control of colonial immigration, despite a firm belief among key ministers that such control was necessary (Carter *et al.* 1993). Partly this was a product of a situational logic engendered by the asynchrony between the structural emergent property of a labour shortage and the cultural emergent property of ideas about race, colour and Britishness. Only partly, of course, because the situational logic

did not apply to those members of Government who did not take the ideas seriously and for whom, therefore, the incompatibility was unrealised. There were those in Government circles, for example, who did not accept that colour or colonial status were appropriate criteria for distinguishing between the rights of British subjects (see, for example, Hansen 2000).

So, at timepoint 1 we see the development of a labour shortage as an SEP arising from the efforts of the Labour Government to revive the UK economy within a particular set of structural and cultural conditions. The decision to increase the size of the working population through the recruitment of foreign labour interacts with these conditions in a number of ways and this interaction is the focus of attention at timepoint 2. The labour shortage contingently attracts British subjects from the Commonwealth and Colonies, but also prompts others in Britain to turn to racist CEPs that run (in many ways) contrary to the requirements of the SEP. This results in a period of cultural and structural adjustment and struggle culminating in timepoint 3, when a new set of structural conditions–immigration controls, race relations legislation, renewed forms of xenophobia and nationalism–confront individuals and collectivities.

Realism, empiricism and empirical research

So far I have discussed how a realist approach to the sociology of racism and race ideas can draw upon an ontology of emergent properties to guide a morphogenetic methodology. The account of the interaction between structure, culture and agency in relation to British postwar immigration has suggested some of the potential of a realist approach to empirical research. The starting point for realising this potential is a more detailed consideration of the notions of analytical dualism and morphogenesis.

It is a core claim of morphogenetic theory that actors' readiness and capacity to employ cultural resources, as well as the adequacy of those resources for making sense of the actors' lived experience, are themselves the outcome of the interplay of structure and agency. To cite Pawson and Tilley's discussion of realism and method, which is generally in accord with critical realism, we may say that 'differently resourced subjects make constrained choices amongst the range of opportunities provided' (1997:46). Policy designed to influence these choices, or research designed to understand them, will be less effective and less perspicuous to the extent that they neglect this insight.

Starting from the claim that 'society as an object of enquiry is necessarily theoretical' (Bhaskar 1979:57), realism offers a radical revision of conventional models of empirical research. This revision derives from the notion of generative causality (Harré 1972, 1986) and its associated core principle that 'science is the business of understanding the unobservable structures and mechanisms that stand behind and produce concrete features of social reality' (Pawson 1989:168).

An important methodological corollary of this ontological claim is that 'measurement in social research will always be an act of translation' (Pawson 1989:287). This is to say that empirical data should be constructed from a

grounding within the conceptual networks of sociological theory, since the social regularities described by such data are themselves the product of scores of distant social processes and mechanisms. In short, measurement in social science is theory-driven.

This view of empirical regularities and the role of theory in social science entails some serious reservations about sociological concepts of race. If empirical research and measurement is theory-driven then social scientists (like their natural science counterparts) require a logically consistent network of concepts capable of formulating and describing the connections between social phenomena that we regard as causally connected. This permits the construction of evidence that enables the possibility of adjudication between rival theories. Race is not such a concept.

To illustrate some of the difficulties that arise when race ideas enter the conceptual schemes of social research, this section will examine some of the empirical research on transracial adoption (TRA). My central claim is that TRA research is flawed because it turns on common-sense concepts of race. Such ideas of race are pre-scientific, and 'differ from scientific ones in being immature: they are less precise, systematic and explicit; they lack a methodology for development' (Devitt and Sterelny 1987:8). More significantly, they carry their theoretical assumptions directly into what is to be measured; their residual essentialism simply cannot be extirpated. Research requires us to specify accurately what it is we wish to measure or evaluate (that is, not race–for this cannot be measured–but, for example, colour discrimination in the housing market).

So, not only does TRA research treat race as a legitimate variable, but it also seeks constant conjunctions between variables, and erroneously assumes that constant conjunction is the defining feature of causality Almost all the empirical studies of TRA start from the assumption that race (invariably identified by skin colour, since most of the studies are US-based) is the key defining variable of the study population (see, for example, the 'meta-analytic review' of such studies in Hollingsworth (1997)). The empirical proposition is then advanced that the 'racial identity' and self-esteem of children of one race (usually defined as black, but sometimes Korean, 'Asian' or even 'Oriental') are in some manner impaired or damaged if they are fostered to carers of another race (usually defined as 'white'). Thereafter, the research design follows a basic pattern. Two groups of 'same-race' children are identified: one has been fostered to white carers (the experimental group), the other to black (or Korean etc.) carers (the control group). The 'racial identity' and self-esteem of the latter group are taken as the norm; the dependent variable is the effect of transracial adoption on racial identity and self-esteem.

In light of the above it is unsurprising that a recent summary of TRA research concluded that opponents of TRA had been unable to produce any empirical studies either to support their position or to demonstrate any of their central claims about the significant mental health problems faced by children of colour placed with 'white' families (Alexander and Curtis 1996:232). Of course, this is due mainly to the operationalisation of some very dubious concepts: 'race', 'racial

identity', self-esteem, and so on. Equally, though, the empiricist research strategy is profoundly flawed.

What would a realist make of this? Firstly, as we have noted already, all measurement is an 'act of translation', whereby knowledge is part of the fallible 'transitive realm' which mediates our access to the 'intransitive realm' of the reality beyond our perspectives (Bhaskar 1979). So, a realist would recognise that data collection priorities are established within theory. Thus, what we take to be the outcome that needs explaining will depend on theoretical assumptions. For instance, as policy makers we might want to explain why some adoptions are successful and others are not. At this point the empiricist would compile data on all successful adoptions and then set about identifying the characteristics they shared in common, such as social class, neighbourhood placement, colour, and so on. These characteristics would then be compared and contrasted with the characteristics of the population of unsuccessful adoptees. The point here is that no matter how sophisticated the statistical techniques employed, such an approach can only identify variables; it cannot tell us about the processes or mechanisms that are responsible for the particular distributions. Nor, as a consequence, can empiricism tell us about the contexts in which some mechanisms will operate or about those in which they do not, or in which their effects are muted or suppressed by the operation of other processes and mechanisms.

Suppose that we hypothesise that the central causal relation governing successful adoption is parental love and commitment to adoption. As a social process this would involve people's choices and the powers and liabilities they possess as agents and actors, and so would not operate mechanically. The purpose of an empirical research strategy, therefore, would be to identify those contexts in which the relation operates and those in which it does not and, from the policy point of view, to maximise the former while minimising the latter. Thus it may well be the case that the love and commitment of some parents is less than wholehearted towards children whom they perceive as 'of another race' or as poor or difficult; their ability to foster may be influenced by their reasons for adoption, by their age or by their neighbourhood, or by some combination of any or all of these.

The purpose of our empirical work should be to devise and implement research strategies that will yield the expected outcome. In other words, if we maintain that the crucial mechanism determining the success of an adoption is carer response, then unsuccessful adoptions provide instances of where the contextual conditions are such that the mechanism is suppressed; people have made different sorts of choices and decisions. Empirical research can then be directed towards discovering in ever greater detail what Pawson and Tilley helpfully summarise as the three Ws—*what* works for *whom* in *what* circumstances (1997:210). Discovering which carers are successful adopters in which circumstances is a task beyond empiricist research. This is because such an aim would require us to theorise about relations between different agents drawing on different CEPs about identity, colour, race, and so on, in an open system where empirical regularities between (dubious) variables are not sufficient to establish knowledge of a causal process at work.

Some realistic prospects

While realism has established a respectable position within the philosophy of science, its impact within the practice of social science has been less significant. Social scientists (with some notable exceptions; see Archer 1995; Byrne 1998; Layder 1993, 1998; May and Williams 1998; Pawson 1989; Pawson and Tilley 1997; Sayer 1994; Williams 2000) have done relatively little in the way of translating the general philosophical claims of realism into practical strategies for social research. The question is, perhaps, how much this state of affairs has to do with the disciplinary division of labour and professional circumscription and how much with the shortcomings of a realist approach to sociological knowledge and social research (Fuller 1997).

Some of these shortcomings derive from the naturalist 'pull' in realism. In particular, the epistemological difficulties encountered in developing realist accounts of social causation and social relations are sometimes underestimated in realist work (which is why, I suspect, many of the illustrative analogies realists employ are taken from the world of the physical sciences). Correspondingly, it is also the case that the powerful insights of hermeneutics can be neglected, while a realist position on subjectivity–the existential validity of human *being*–remains underdeveloped (although see Archer 2000; Craib 1998; Soper 1995).

So, not only are more examples of realist social research needed, but also such research needs to consider the tensions within realism itself. This is especially urgent when we consider the benefits of a sociological realism. On the basis of the account offered above, I want to point to two such benefits. Firstly, realism provides a cogent defence of objectivity and an evolutionary view of the growth of knowledge (see, for example, Layder 1990; Mouzelis 1995; Norris 1996, 1997; Sayer 1994, 1997; Trigg 1993). To insist that social scientific knowledge is knowledge *of* an ontologically stratified social reality is, it seems to me, the most compelling means of disposing of the relativist claim that our theories are entirely self-referential.

However, and secondly, realism is resolutely post-empiricist in its stress on the theory-driven nature of social scientific knowledge. The prominence of theory leads to both a distinctive view of empirical research as the identification of mechanisms and contexts responsible for regularities, and a sharp break with those sociologies that insist on the commonality of social scientific and lay languages or discourses. While acknowledging their common sources, realism retains the view that theoretical languages serve different purposes to those of the languages of everyday life (Carter and Sealey 2000).

Mouzelis has recently summed up the major task of sociology 'as not only providing fully worked-out, conceptual edifices (*à la* Parsons or Giddens), but also as providing tentative, flexible, open-ended, transitional frameworks useful for the empirical, comparative investigation of specific sociological problems' (1995:152). It seems to me that realist sociological research offers rich resources for just such a task–and you can still take the escalator any time you like.

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9 Cultural studies

Towards a realist intervention

Gary MacLennan and Peter Thomas

Introduction

In general terms, this chapter is an attempt to answer the following question: what difference does critical realism make within the field of cultural studies? The short answer to this would have to be, regrettably: as yet, not much. Nevertheless, we are convinced of the potential of critical realism, especially in the guise of dialectical critical realism (DCR), to make a significant contribution to cultural studies. To demonstrate this, we examine, firstly, the history of cultural studies; secondly, its turn to policy; and, finally, its move to embrace the new media, creative industries and the new economy.[1] We conclude this overview by suggesting some critical realist solutions to the aporia of cultural studies as currently practised.

Cultural studies now

As a discipline, contemporary cultural studies shows many signs of strength and vitality, and appears to demonstrate an impressive range of interests among scholars working in the field. For instance, a recent anthology on American cultural studies, representative of the diversity of the field more generally, covers a wide variety of subjects, including identity politics, Native American Studies, transvestites, AIDS and Queer Theory (Hartley and Pearson 2000).

However, rather than characterising this diversity as an impressive and liberal range of interests, we believe that it is best described as an 'eclecticism', that is, an arbitrary collection of discourses and practices lacking any clearly articulated common features or political perspectives. Characterised in this way, such eclecticism betokens not strength but a problem, in terms of the absence of a Lakatosian core to the research programme. Of course, this putatively absent centre has a long history in the formulation of cultural studies as an academic research programme. Consider, for example, Stuart Hall's famous refusal to define cultural studies in traditional disciplinary terms, preferring instead to see it as a field of political intervention (Hall 1992:279, 284). However, we would argue that the apparent eclecticism and absent centre of contemporary cultural studies are deceptive. Indeed, we maintain that in

the current context what has actually happened is that the field has developed a hierarchy, in which eclecticism prevails in terms of the substantive intellectual approaches and concerns of contemporary cultural studies. This apparent pluralism, however, often functions as a smokescreen, or dialectical counterpart, for the unofficial centre of the discipline, which has developed around what can only be called the organic intellectuals of very late capitalism. We refer here to those cultural critics who, to a greater or less extent, have abandoned the commitment to critique which informed and even defined much of the previous good work in the field. They have embraced instead the brave new world of policy under the sign of a specious social democracy (Cunningham 1992) and appeals to political 'realism'. This, then, became a pathway to a more thorough capitulation to the imperatives of capital via projects such as 'Cool Britannia' and the Creative Industries initiatives (Heartfield 2000; Hartley and Haseman 2000).

Thus, we characterise the field of cultural studies as consisting of a pragmatic core that gained its initial and clearest theoretical formulation in the cultural policy initiatives of the early 1990s. Around this is a bulwark consisting of an eclecticism that is at times illuminating and which at others tends towards the trivial. To understand how this situation has developed one needs to take a closer look at the history of the cultural studies project.

History

The history of cultural studies can be gleaned from a variety of sources (see, for example, Turner 1990; Agger 1992; Grosberg *et al.* 1992; Frow and Morris 1993; Davies 1995; During 1999; Hartley and Pearson 2000). It is not our intention to rehearse this in any great detail, nor to offer an analysis of the different conditions under which cultural studies has developed in its different national and institutional locations. Rather, we wish to emphasise a number of key political moments in the evolution of the discipline. The formation of cultural studies, particularly in its early and influential British variant, has often been linked to the development of the first New Left. Crucial to this development was the move by a number of key leftist intellectuals in the early years of the Cold War away from the general intellectual environment dominated by official Communist parties. In Britain, this intellectual group included such noted figures as Raymond Williams, E.P. Thompson, Richard Hoggart (the founding director of the Birmingham Centre for Cultural Studies) and Stuart Hall, Hoggart's successor and arguably the most influential figure in the formation of cultural studies as an academic discipline and research project.

Central to the early cultural studies project was a rejection of Leavisism's distinction between high and low culture and its consequent valorisation of literature over other related cultural practices (cf. Eagleton 1983:17–53). Instead, cultural studies was to be, in the words of Raymond Williams in *The Long Revolution,* 'the study of relationships between elements in a whole way of life' (Williams 1961:61–3).

Significantly, cultural studies was conceived in this period as an explicitly oppositional political formation, in which the emphasis upon 'elements in a whole way of life', or the cultural and social totality, was linked with a commitment to the practice of critique. As Stuart Hall recalled–in terms which indicate the Gramscian and, more generally, Marxist influence upon the formation of cultural studies–the early Birmingham school had been 'trying to find an institutional practice that might produce an organic intellectual' (Hall 1992:281). By this he meant an intellectual organic to the emerging new social movements and upsurge of socialist politics of the 1960s and 1970s who would contribute to the unmasking of the workings of bourgeois ideology.

However, while the formation of cultural studies had participated in the more general political optimism and engagement of the 1960s and early 1970s, the conservative counter-revolution of Thatcher and Reagan in the 1980s and the decline of the Left was witnessed by the rise of an increasingly modest and politically quiescent tendency within cultural studies. Deprived of any immediate avenues or agencies for political transformation, the attempt to change the world that had accompanied the genesis of cultural studies was displaced into the theoretical realm. From the late 1970s onwards, cultural studies became a veritable cornucopia of competing theoretical paradigms and frameworks: first structuralism, then legacies of the Frankfurt school, feminism, psychoanalysis, semiotics, post-structuralism, postmodernism–all were incorporated and each competed for hegemony

Although cultural studies continued to produce much good and important work under these new conditions, far surpassing the achievements of the early years in terms of the sheer range of its interests and approaches, it was unable to do so without incurring certain significant political costs. In particular, themes such as the social relations of production, domination and exploitation became increasingly obscured, if not ignored, and many practitioners' emphases shifted onto a concern with subjectivities and discourse, particularly in its Foucauldian formulation. At the same time, the neoliberal assault upon higher-education funding, particular for the humanities, produced a climate of austerity in which cultural studies was increasingly called upon to provide 'pragmatic' justifications of itself as a good citizen of the New World Order. So, although enriched in its substantive intellectual concerns and judgements by the 'turn to theory', the loss of political focus (a contingent rather than necessary consequence of this turn) was to leave the cultural studies project open to increasing incorporation with the institutional frameworks and ideological common sense of the established bourgeois culture. This shrinking of horizons was finally to be given a theoretical formulation by Tony Bennett, Colin Mercer, Ian Hunter *et al.* in the infamous cultural policy studies debate.

The cultural policy debate

The policy debate in Australia began in 1989 when Tony Bennett announced a shift in orientation within the field of cultural studies towards cultural policy.

That the year was 1989 was not of course a coincidence. At the time it was difficult to see its significance, but with hindsight one can argue that for many erstwhile 'Marxist' intellectuals the collapse of the Soviet Union spelt the end of their illusions concerning the socialist nature of Soviet imperialism and signalled the need to accommodate the existing state of affairs in the triumphant capitalist West.

Bennett in particular was very clear about what this entailed. He argued that culture needed to be seen as 'intrinsically governmental'. Somewhat more clearly he defined culture as

> [a]n historically specific set of institutionally embedded relations of government in which forms of thought and conduct of extended populations are targeted for transformation–in part via the extension through the social body of the forms, techniques, and regimens of aesthetic and intellectual culture.
>
> (quoted in Flew 1999:1)

Cultural policy studies, then, was to involve an analysis of that 'truth/power symbiosis which characterises particular regions of social management–with a view not only to undoing that symbiosis but also […] installing a new one in its place' (Bennett 1990:240).

One of the implications of this definition was that cultural policy was moved centre stage. It was no longer, as Bennett put it, an 'optional add-on'. Consequently, this change of empahsis had serious implications for previous practices within the field. What of those aspects of cultural studies that were wedded to the notion of critique and, moreover, often had a Marxist lineage? How could this previously dominant critical paradigm sit with the turn to policy? Quite simply, it could not. If Bennett's definition of policy was to become central, then all practices that were less easily articulated alongside the formation of government policies had to be abandoned.

An extremely influential and in many ways subtle formulation of the policy push was given by Stuart Cunningham. He argued for the dominance of the social democratic over the revolutionary paradigm (Cunningham 1992). For Cunningham, the problem was that cultural theorists tended to be dominated by

> metaphors of resistance and opposition [which] predispose us to view the policy-making process as inevitably compromised, incomplete and inadequate, peopled with those inexpert and ungrounded in theory and history or those wielding gross forms of political power for short term ends.
>
> (1992:9)

Significantly, Cunningham's next thrust was drawn from the Marxist paradigm itself. He taunted the neo-Marxist practitioners of critique by accusing them of practising 'critical idealism'. By this he meant presumably the belief that criticism itself would be sufficient to bring about a change in *das bestehende,* the existing

state of affairs. The alternative was a materialism of practice, which in this case meant participating in policy formulation.

And so the battle lines were seemingly very clearly drawn. On the one hand were the devotees of critique who were apparently still in thrall to dreams of the workers' paradise to come; on the other were the champions of the new realism, those, like Cunningham, who advocated a social democratic reformism and an outright rejection of what he termed a 'totalising and confrontational rhetoric' (1992:11). A 'social democratic view of citizenship' was now the 'missing link' (1992:10).

We cannot let this claim pass without pointing out that in embracing social democracy these former 'revolutionaries' were embracing a programme and a politics that had decisively broken with its revolutionary Marxist origins in 1914 when the German Social Democrats voted to finance the German war effort. As Lenin observed at the time of the capitulation of the social democratic Second International, '[o]pportunism has become over-ripe; it has turned into social-chauvinism and has utterly deserted to the camp of the bourgeoisie' (1946:642). Furthermore, as should have been clear to the Australian advocates of the policy programme, social democracy in the 1990s was no longer a movement which even pretended to offer serious opposition to capitalists' increasing exploitation of labour. Rather, as the Hawke-Keating government of 1983–96 clearly demonstrated, it was now directly engaged in managing, maintaining and extending the status quo.

We would like to essay an immanent critique of the policy model before we attempt to see how it fares in the new century. For a start, the model's crucial weakness was dialectically its strength. In Australia, while an ostensibly social democratic government remained in power, then perhaps it did seem to make sense to temper one's criticisms and to participate in the process of reform. However, with the demise of what passes for social democracy in the present conjuncture and the advent of the Howard Liberal-National Party government in 1996, the scope for participation in policy formulation narrowed considerably.

Instead of the 'enabling state' of the social democratic fantasy, there was now a government committed to a neo-liberal agenda, which saw government not as the solution but as the problem. Thus the eager avatars of policy found that they were in fact once more out in the cold. Their denunciations of neo-Marxist critique availed them little in the presence of a government blind to such fine distinctions on the Left. This, perhaps, was the source of the motivation for the decamping from Australia to Britain upon the election of the Blair government of such central players in the policy movement as Tony Bennett and Colin Mercer, as the Cool Britannia project opened up new opportunities for exerting practical force.

Cultural studies and the new economy

By the mid-1990s cultural policy studies had been largely unsuccessful in its aspiration to become the 'Queen of the Sciences' and it settled into an uneasy

modus vivendi with the continuing practices of critique, which, however, as we have noted, tended to develop into an eclecticism in the absence of a clearly articulated theoretical focus. We should stress, though, that the moment of policy has far from passed. In Bhaskarian terms, the move to policy is a real tendency that exists in the intransitive domain and is at times actualised and at others not. An example of this is the formation of the Key Centre for Policy Studies involving cross-institutional cooperation between Queensland University, Griffith University and Queensland University of Technology (QUT) in Brisbane.

However, the current conjuncture gives us a clear sign that the political conditions that gave birth to the policy movement have now spawned an even more curious progeny in the form of the creative industries initiatives. The Key Centre has now been disbanded and replaced by inter-institutional rivalry based around the creative industries.

The creative industries are described by their defenders thus:

> We are all in the thin-air business these days […] most people in advanced economies produce nothing that can be weighed: communications, software, advertising, financial services. They trade, write, design, talk, spin, and create; rarely do they make anything.
>
> (Leadbetter quoted in Heartfield 2000:18)

When intellectuals like Leadbetter posit such notions as the 'thin-air business' they forget about the sweatshops that form the bedrock of the creative industries in the First as well as the Third World. They also neglect to point out, as Heartfield correctly emphasises, that the turn to creative industries in Britain can only be understood in the context of the decline in investment in British industry and the overall decay of the British economy. This decline in investment, Heartfield argues, has freed up money for conspicuous consumption by the capitalist class. This in turn has helped to fuel the creative industries (Heartfield 1998:47).

As Jim McGuigan has pointed out, the creative industries phenomenon has been associated with the advent of the Blair government in May 1997 (McGuigan 1998:68). Interestingly, however, Blair was initially anxious to keep his distance from those sectors of the arts world that had traditionally supported the Labour Party against the Conservatives. Blair's Cool Britannia was not seen to be compatible with any notion of an oppositional art.

As editors of *Creative Industries: A Reader* (2000), John Hartley and Brad Haseman show a similar determination to distance themselves from the old and the oppositional. Having briefly acknowledged the influence of such Marxist theorists as Adorno and the Frankfurt School in the formation of cultural studies, Hartley and Haseman turn with evident relief to the theories of Nicholas Garnham. Unlike the work of Adorno *et al,* Garnham's analysis 'begins the process of trying to identify culture as a sector of the economy that can be exploited no matter what your politics are. It's not a matter of left or right and the old adversaries' (Hartley and Haseman 2000:1).

This brief exegesis of Garnham's position leads seamlessly into a definition of creative industries as

> a term which moves us beyond trying to understand culture as something pure, outside of industry and outside of the processes of everyday life or culture (like high culture), or as some sort of pathology that's getting in the way of 'proper politics' (like some views of popular culture). The current terminology of creative industries privileges creativity, but insists that this creativity operates within a framework that produces economic outcomes.
>
> *(ibid.)*

There are some themes here that are familiar to us from the cultural policy debate. Firstly, there is the rejection of a concept of cultural studies based on the 'high versus low culture' distinction. This is linked to a refusal to conceptualise elements of cultural practice as escaping the imperatives of bourgeois commodity production (leading, necessarily, to a mere rejection of aesthetic categories rather than their critique). Likewise, there is no attempt to see culture as an arena from which there might be drawn resources to negate or transcend the existing state of affairs. Thus creative industries, as conceptualised by Hartley and Haseman, would appear to lack a transcending aesthetic or an ethical commitment to the betterment of humankind. Such a comment may be unduly harsh, but it is necessary to point out, for instance, that within the wealth of documents produced on creative industries at QUT, the ethical has been studiously ignored. When it does appear, as in a recent paper delivered by Hartley to the Cultural Studies Association of Australia (CSAA), it functions as the repressed and scorned negative–the 'Ethical High Ground' where those academics go who do not want to embrace the brave new worlds of the new media, the new economy and the creative industries (Hartley 2000:15).

Indeed, Hartley's address to the CSAA is worth considering in some detail because it encapsulates the essential features of the most recent of the new turns in cultural studies. He begins by claiming that 'this is a good time for cultural studies', if not indeed a 'Golden Age' (2000:12). The reason advanced is that the new economy and the new media are converging on the content industries of 'publishing, computer applications, media, design, music, performance, professional writing and journalism' *(ibid.)*. This has been an area of concern for cultural studies for some time. Hartley, though, claims that here has been a slippage from the 'good analytic tradition [of cultural studies, to the…] cultural studies with funding' that the content industries themselves practise *(ibid.)*.

This is an important matter and one where theoretical clarity is truly needed. However, Hartley has little if anything to say of the relationship that holds between these two forms of cultural studies–cultural studies A (traditional) and cultural studies B (content industries-based). Nevertheless, he does claim that '[t]heir [the content industries] address to ordinary people, especially young people, holds as much *emancipatory* potential as does the most impassioned critique of the *soi-disant* "public intellectual"' (*ibid.;* emphasis added).

Unfortunately, Hartley does not specify what he means by 'emancipatory' in this context. Nor is it stated clearly in Hartley's address. The strong implication is, though, that cultural studies A should subsumed under cultural studies B via the mechanism of the new media and the new economy. This would, among other things, involve abandoning the last elements of critique, which in any case is only practised by 'secular scientists' and 'radical' intellectuals in search of power (2000:13, 15). So there is little to worry about in this brave new world. We can, Hartley assures us, 'swing both ways'. We can, he claims, be like the

> participants on both sides of the barricades at the recent World Economic Forum in Melbourne [held on 11–13 September 2000], who basically agreed with each other that there are environmental and labour costs to globalisation, and a 'democratic deficit' in transnational dealings and institutions.
>
> (2000:13)

What Hartley neglects to point out here is that although those inside the Forum may have agreed that there is a 'cost', only one side is paying it. Moreover, despite this 'basic agreement', the Victorian police in Melbourne handed out savage beatings only to those outside the barricades erected around the Forum, which fittingly enough was hosted at the Melbourne Casino. But so determined is Hartley to fill the role of Pangloss that a few hundred bashed demonstrators are as nothing. He assures us that there is 'no traditional wall of fear and loathing between it [cultural studies] and the world. That world is commercial, *demotic,* games-oriented' (2000:14; emphasis added).

The 'wall of fear and loathing' is of course a caricature of the process of critique. But this wall is well and truly down, even though there is still the odd wailing radical wandering around. Nevertheless, Hartley is in the breach, urging on cultural studies to 'take a lead in modernising the arts and humanities, and in innovating new modes of research, criticism, teaching and the commercial application of knowledge and creative content' (2000:16).

It is necessary to refuse this vision. Hartley may see the world of very late capitalism as one of exciting opportunity but this is the vision of the privileged intellectual. It is something of an irony that this intellectual claims to speak on behalf of the people against the 'knowledge class'. In truth, however, he is the new organic intellectual of capital who believes that he lives in 'the best of all possible worlds', while studiously forgetting F.H. Bradley's sardonic addition to Leibniz's dictum: 'and everything in it is a necessary evil' (quoted in Russell 1945:581).

Critical realist solutions

In general terms, critical realism can offer cultural studies the grounds for critical practice. The refutation of empiricism and post-structuralist irrealism, based on the restoration of ontology, provides the possibility of a decisive break from the

stagnation between the postmodernists in the discursive periphery and the neo-realists and pragmatists who now occupy the creative industries centre within the cultural studies research programme.

The return to dialectics enables a critique of the status quo, and posits a dialectic of the desire to freedom. This in turn motivates the restoration of the concept of teleology. This is presented in its weak form as being encapsulated in the affirmation of a 'conatus to […] freedom' (Bhaskar 1993:169). The stronger form is found where Bhaskar asserts categorically that this conatus to self-fulfilment will be 'eventually realised' through the process of karmically determined reincarnations (Bhaskar 2000:37).

The Bhaskarian dialectic as outlined in *Dialectic: The Pulse of Freedom* (1993) consists of four levels or moments. These deal with non-identity, negativity, totality and agency (Bhaskar 1993:8–13). Alongside this dialectic, Bhaskar claims that the key to a critical realist (cultural) politics is the enlargement of ontology to include absence. Societal ills are seen as absences and the dialectic of freedom consists of the absenting of constraints on the absenting of ills. Also important in this context is Bhaskar's defence of the notion of a eudaimonistic society linked to a programme of concrete utopianism (1993:279–98). As part of this programme, the aesthetic is constructed in practical terms as 'living well' and is sublated within the ethical (Bhaskar 1994:154).

As a movement, critical realism seeks to underlabour for human emancipation and consequently sets up emancipation as the goal of the social sciences, philosophy and, with the publication of *From East to West,* theology (Bhaskar 2000). The end state of this process is a

> society in which, to use Marx's words, 'the free development of each is a condition of the free development of all', that is which is grounded in the concrete singularity of each and every one (and the former as a condition for the latter) based on the core human equality derived from our shared species-being […] and oriented to the presses of human flourishing in the context of concern for future generations, other species and nature generally
>
> (Bhaskar 1993:179)

It need hardly be said that this orientation presents a radically different set of tasks and possibilities for cultural studies than is currently presented, either by those who are scrambling desperately to get aboard the creative industries band wagon, or by the postmodernist discursive tendency who, although they may not have been converted by the notion of creative industries, have nevertheless taken the discursive turn, which is just as limiting for critique (as will be mentioned later in our discussion of power).

Here we would like to consider briefly, in more specific terms, how dialectical critical realism might make a difference to cultural studies. The following themes are by no means exhaustive; rather, they are merely intended as the beginning of a critical realist intervention into cultural studies:

1 The restoration and development of a philosophically rigorous account of the concept of ideology, and in particular the elaboration of the notions of fusion and fission (Bhaskar 1993:180).
2 The development of the distinction between $Power_1$ and $Power_2$ and how it could undo some of the worst excesses of the Foucauldians (1993:402).
3 The insistence on the distraction function of much popular culture and how it could help to inoculate us against the idiocies of those popular cultural theorists who have bowdlerised Bakhtin's carnival theory in an often silly celebration of the popular (Fiske 2000).

Critical realism and ideology

A key moment in the history of cultural studies is surely the publication in 1980 of Abercrombie *et al*.'s *The Dominant Ideology Thesis*. This led to a general abandonment within cultural studies analysis of the concept of ideology and its replacement with what Murdoch terms 'critical pluralism', whereby the 'cultural field' is viewed

> as the site of a continual struggle between competing discourses, each offering a particular way of looking at or speaking about the social world (or particular segments of it), and engaged in a contest for visibility and legitimacy across a range of institutions.
>
> (Murdoch 1993:84)

Murdoch, it must be said, is aware that in the market place some discourses are 'more equal' than others, as they are 'backed by greater material resources and have preferential access to the major means of publicity and policy-making' *(ibid)*. Nevertheless, the concept of critical pluralism misses the notion that certain ideologies are essential to capitalism.

It was left to Bhaskar to revive the notion of ideology and to give it a rigorous scientific basis. He did this by arguing that 'the appellation "ideology" to the set of ideas *P* is only justified if their necessity can be demonstrated; that is if they can be explained as well as criticised' (Bhaskar 1979:67). What form does this process of explanation take? Bhaskar suggests that before a practice *I* can be termed ideological, a theory *T* is required which must satisfy three kinds of criteria: critical, explanatory and categorical.

The critical criterion is satisfied when *T* can:

1 explain most, or the most significant, phenomena, under its own descriptions, explained by *I,* and
2 explain in addition a significant set of phenomena not explained by *I* (1979:68)

The explanatory criterion is met when *T* can:

3 explain the reproduction of *I* (that is, roughly, the conditions for its continued acceptance by agents) and, if possible, specify the limits of *I* and the (endogenous) conditions for its transformation (if any) specifically
4 in terms of a real stratification or connection (that is, a level of structure or set of relations) described in *T* but altogether absent from or obscured in *I*; and
5 explain, or at least situate, itself within itself (1979:67–8)

The categorical criterion is satisfied when *I* cannot (while *T* can) satisfy either:

6 a criterion of scientificity, specifying the minimum necessary conditions for the characterisation of a production as scientific; or
7 a criterion of domain-adequacy, specifying the minimum necessary conditions for a theory to sustain the historical or social (or whatever) nature of its subject matter (1979:88)

Alongside this philosophically rigorous use of the term 'ideological', Bhaskar also developed a number of concepts that greatly assist the process of 'ideology critique'. We refer here especially to the mechanisms of 'fusion' and 'fission'. Ideological fusion takes place when sectional interests are represented as universal. The inverse of this is ideological fission where interests that are universal are presented as sectional (Bhaskar 1993:168). We can see these processes at work in phenomena as diverse as that of profit and wages. Profits, which belong primarily to the capitalist class, are presented in the mass media as being universally good. Thus, they tend to *rise* and we are all expected to rejoice accordingly and wait patiently for the trickle-down effect. On the other hand, wages, on which almost everyone depends, are a constant source of worry in the mainstream media, for wage increases (or 'demands' for wage increases) tend to *break out* rather in the manner of plagues and dangerous criminals and animals.

Critical realism and power

It is one of the great ironies of contemporary thought that the concept of power formulated by an anarchist like Foucault has been seized upon by social democrats in an effort to weld cultural studies to the practice of social democracy. Within the Foucauldian *Weltanschauung,* power is no longer conceived of as being possessed by some groups and not by others. Nor is it perceived as having a particular location that can be stormed from the outside. Moreover, power is no longer seen as an instrument of a particular mode of production, nor does it simply operate to produce ideological effects (Foucault, cited in Morris and Patton 1979:59). Rather, Foucault argues that

> [p]ower is not possessed, it acts in the very body and over the whole surface of the social field according to a system of relays, modes of connection, transmission, distribution, etc. Power acts through the smallest elements: the

> family, sexual relations, but also: residential relations, neighbourhoods, etc. As far as I go in the social network, I always find power as something which 'runs through', that acts, that brings about effects. It becomes effective or not, that is, power is always a definite form of momentary and constantly reproduced encounters among a definite number of individuals. Power is thus not possessed because it is 'in play', because it risks itself. Power is won like a battle and lost in just the same way. At the heart of power is a war-like relation and not that of an appropriation.
>
> (Foucault, quoted in Morris and Patton 1979:59–60)

The neo-Nietzschean provenance of this conceptualisation of power should be clear. Power is seen as being literally everywhere, and the 'will to power' is a fundamental imperative that defines what it is to be human. Moreover, truth is subsumed under power, whereby we have the notions of 'regimes of truth', each of which are society's officially approved version of things (Foucault 1980:131).[2]

In contrast to the Foucauldian analysis of power, the critical realist account of power is an essential component of a movement that sets itself the task of underlabouring for human emancipation. Fundamental to the critical realist model is the distinction between $Power_1$ and $Power_2$. The former has to do with the 'transformative capacity analytic to the concept of agency', that is, the capacity to get anything done; the latter involves 'structures of domination, exploitation, subjugation and control' (Bhaskar 1991:60).

It should not be necessary to point out that postmodernist thought, especially in its Foucauldian guise, is marked by its refusal to make any distinction between $Power_1$ and $Power_2$ (Foucault 1980; Morris and Patton 1979). It is our contention that this refusal severely limits the relevance of Foucauldian thought for an emancipatory cultural politics. Thus, in contrast to many similar strains of postmodernist thought, critical realism argues that $Power_2$ can be abolished but that $Power_1$ cannot.

At this point we would like to re-emphasise the impact of these differing views of power. If, like Bennet *et al.,* one adapts a Foucauldian notion of power, one abandons the radical dream of a world without oppression. Instead, one enters the realm of moral relativism, beyond good and evil, where the only question is who has the strong enough will to wield power. In so doing, the critical impulse that once fed cultural studies, the dream of a world without oppression, is annulled. That, we would argue, is precisely the attraction of Foucault's thought for the social democratic advocates of policy.

By contrast, the critical realist model of power provides the theoretical motivation for a struggle with $Power_2$. Critique can lay bare the mechanisms of $Power_1$. Within this schema, cultural studies continues to have a relevance and a *raison d'être*. The fact that one is marginalised or excluded from the halls of power does not, *contra* Cunningham and Bennett, negate one's critique, because one continues to have a moral imperative to oppose the operations of $Power_2$.

Cultural studies and the popular: substituting for the ethical

As we have stressed, one of the founding impulses of cultural studies was a refusal of the Leavisite definition of high versus low culture. Instead of a simple reversal of this politically disabling binary opposition, cultural studies aspired to conceptualise the entire field of cultural practices as a totality of practices within society. As Andrew Milner correctly notes,

> the real promise of cultural studies had always been contained, not in the discovery of a new empirical subject matter, but in a 'deconstruction' of the very theoretical boundaries that had hitherto demarcated literature from fiction, art from culture, the elite from the popular.
>
> (Milner 1996:18)

However, it seems to us that much of contemporary cultural studies has fallen away from this challenge and reinstated the high/low culture distinction. Rather than 'literature', however, it is now the 'popular' which is valorised. The general political coordinates of this hypostatisation of the popular can be discerned in the clash between Raymond Williams's judgement of Anstey and Elton's film *Housing Problems* (1935) and John Hartley's verdict on the same documentary. Williams refers to the film's 'superb demotic style' (Williams, quoted in Aspinall 1982:148). Hartley, on the other hand, argues that *Housing Problems* is the *locus classicus* of the baleful influence of his hated 'knowledge class' (Hartley, quoted in Geraghty and Lusted 1998). According to Hartley, the knowledge class produce expert solutions that are then imposed on their working-class 'victims'.

For Hartley the villains are the modernising experts. Such experts are so evil that they are even compared to the Bolsheviks in their drive to establish centralised planning and impose expert knowledge (Hartley 1998:39). Thus Hartley inveighs against the knowledge class's critical approach to television. Others cast in the role of villain would seem to be Stuart Hall and Raymond Williams and their opposition to social democracy (1998:47).

There is a quite bewildering amount of slippage here and it may help to retrace our steps. Firstly, Hartley champions the working class over the knowledge class. Secondly, he equates the knowledge class with Bolshevism. Thirdly, he brings in Hall and Williams and accuses them of disliking the popular. Fourthly, this alleged dislike of the popular is then equated with opposing social democracy. When the words 'social democracy' are used like this they lose all referential value. But it is this implicit equation of the popular with social democracy that represents the genuinely political moment in Hartley's thought. Unfortunately, this moment contains the same contradictions and incoherence as the pale ghost of social democracy that it purports to revive.

The problem remains that within Hartley's thought the romanticising impulse is never far away. Admiration for working-class communal life slips all too easily into an uncritical, 'workerist' celebration of the popular. If there is much of this in Hartley, it becomes even more marked in the work of John Fiske. Thus, in an

article on the politics of information (reprinted in Hartley and Pearson 2000), he contrasts three kinds of news. Firstly, there is the official news, which is to be found in the quality press and on networked television. Secondly, there is the alternative news, circulated in radical journals such as *The Nation* (published in New York). Lastly, there is the popular news, which flourishes throughout television and the tabloid press. For Fiske, official and alternative news are produced out of the political struggle between class fractions. Ultimately it is a battle within the power bloc that is the source of both (Fiske, cited in Hartley and Pearson 2000:354).

Leaving aside for a moment this characterisation of alternative news, we would like to point out a significant omission in Fiske's discussion of popular news. We are told it is consumed on television and the tabloid press. We are not told where it is produced. Fiske skips over the fact that the so-called popular news is produced from within the power bloc in order to celebrate what he sees as the 'transgressive' virtues of tabloid news. As with much of Fiske's work, a bowdlerised and de-historicised Bakhtin is dragged on stage to give an air of theoretical *gravitas* to what is little more than an exercise in workerism (Fiske 2000:355). The problem with workerism is, as Collier has pointed out, that it aims 'not at the emancipation of the working class […] but at the glorification of the qualities that they have as a result of being oppressed–hence the perpetuation of their oppression' (Collier 1999:51).

To be fair, Fiske seems sometimes to be aware of the dangers of the empty celebration of the popular, and he does insert the occasional caveat, such as the following:

> While I believe that the pleasures of scepticism and of parodic excess can be progressive I do not wish to suggest that they are always or necessarily so. The politics of popular culture are as deeply conflicted as the experience of the people
>
> (Fiske, quoted in Hartley and Pearson 2000:357).

However, his is a deeply non-dialectical approach. Thus he refuses not only to discuss the source of popular news, but he also neglects to examine its relationship to the official world. The relationship is not simply one of scepticism as Fiske seems to believe. Rather, it is a sanctioned scepticism. In Bhaskarian terms, popular news forms a dialectical counterpart with the official news. While seemingly in opposition they instead form a mutually supporting ensemble based on a shared but never articulated common ground, which is that the working class is intrinsically inferior and has to be entertained and kept away from an understanding of the world. Against such workerist tendencies as are exhibited by Hartley and Fiske it is necessary to affirm that the solution to the 'commercialized and bourgeoisified [nature…] of consumer capitalist/ postmodernist society' is not to lick our chains, but rather, as Bhasakar puts it, to 'engage in counter-hegemonic struggle and the totalizing depth praxis that dialectical rationality demands' (Bhaskar 1993:153–4).

Towards a concrete utopianism

In this chapter we have given an account of what we believe to be the origins of the current state of affairs within cultural studies. We have been critical of the loss of political focus that accompanied the broadening of cultural studies' theoretical foundations and its shying away from explanatory political critique. We have also been hard on the allied flight to pseudo-critique, with Foucauldian notions of power being everywhere so that there can be no political critique of injustice. By contrast we have offered for consideration what critical realists have to say about ideology and power.

We have also been sceptical of the claims of the policy and creative industries paradigms. It is now necessary to ask in conclusion: what have been the achievements of the policy move? In Australia, where the policy paradigm originated, Bennett and his co-workers had high hopes for great happenings under the Hawke and Keating Labour governments. However, the new realists were to witness a cutback in government funding in all the traditional arts areas. The pragmatism of the prophets of policy was to founder in the realities of neoliberalism. Nor is it likely that the new paradigm of creative industries (or policy Mark II) will fare any better. While the bulls run on Wall Street there will continue to be those that believe in the 'weightless world'. However, the fate of Blair's prized symbol of Cool Britannia, the Millennium Dome, should be a sobering reminder to those tempted to believe in their own propaganda. Moreover, the recent wholesale carnage among the 'dot.coms' is surely proof that hype may indeed be 'weightless' but the world certainly is not.

The final and most important contribution that we believe critical realism can make to the rejuvenation of cultural studies is Bhaskar's notion of a concrete utopianism. Against the facile capitulation to the imperatives of capital by those promoting the nexus of the creative industries, the new technology and the new economy, and against their boasts to have discovered the realm of freedom in the postmodern play of the market, it is necessary to stress that although 'the concrete utopian imagination' does not provide recipes for the kitchens of the future, it does affirm that

> [t]he eudaimonistic society would be an open one in which it would be up to the totality of concretely singularised individuals to decide what to do with their freedoms. Dialectic is the process of absenting constraints on the absenting absences (ills, constraints, untruths, etc.). It is not in the business of telling people, in commandist (Stalinist) or elitist (Social Democratic) fashion what to do. Rather it is better conceived as an inner urge that flows universally from the logic of elemental absence (lack, need, want or desire). It manifests itself wherever power $_2$ relations hold sway. It is the heartbeat of a positively generalised concept of freedom as flourishing and as autonomy and as reason. It is irrepressible.
>
> (Bhaskar 1993:298–9)

Within cultural studies such a concrete utopianism necessarily requires a return to the practices of critique and a re-engagement with the aims of the founders of cultural studies. This in turn implies a willingness to stand against the tide of both postmodernist trivialising and the blandishments of the market in this the age of scarcity. It remains our conviction that critical realism is vital to any such attempt to renew cultural studies.

Notes

1 By the term 'new economy' we mean concepts such as the information economy the growth of services, and so on. However, this does not imply that we are uncritical of the hype associated with such terms. 'New media' refers to the new technology associated primarily with the Internet.

2 Any discussion of Foucault's concept of power has to deal with the following claim which he made towards the end of his life: 'I am very far from a theoretician of power. At the limit, I would say that power, as a question, does not interest me' (quoted in Callinicos 1989:88). Such a denial is, of course, as Callinicos points out, 'characteristic' of Foucault's scholarship.

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Part IV

Political economy and globalism

10 Naturalism and economics

Paul Lewis

Introduction

This chapter examines the issue of whether critical realism has the potential to make a contribution to the discipline of economics.[1] Appraisals of the impact of critical realism on particular disciplines often focus on the extent to which the critical realist account of socio-economic reality might usefully augment existing approaches, for example, by drawing attention to hitherto ignored but potentially explanatorily significant aspects of the socio-economic world.[2] In this respect, critical realism in economics is no exception. Critical realists working in economics have emphasised the significance of ontological issues for economic analysis, arguing that the adoption of a metaphysics that does justice to the richness and complexity of socio-economic life is of paramount importance for the future health of the discipline (Lawson 1997).[3]

However, while this explanatory aspect of the critical realist contribution to economics is touched on below, it is not the main focus of this chapter. Rather, the discussion that follows centres on the importance of the possibility of naturalism. At issue is the significance (if any) for economics of the claim sponsored by critical realism that, viewed at an appropriate level of abstraction, the study of the socio-economic world can be seen to proceed in the same way as the investigation of the natural world. The import of this claim is not immediately obvious. After all, one of the central tenets of critical realism is that the methods and modes of explanation utilised in social studies are most likely to be fruitful if they are tailored to suit the properties of the socio-economic material under investigation (Archer 1998:72–3). It follows, therefore, that the possibility of naturalism must emerge *ex posteriori* from separate analyses of the ontology of the natural and socio-economic realms and of the methods and modes of explanation that are suitable for investigating them. And if it is possible–indeed, obligatory–to characterise the methods appropriate for social studies independently of those employed by natural scientists, one might be tempted to conclude the following: that although the *ex posteriori* observation that a natural sciences approach is indeed possible may be of some (limited) intrinsic interest, it is inconsequential for social science.

However, such a conclusion is unwarranted, at least as far as the discipline of economics is concerned. The critical realist account of the possibility of naturalism (outlined in the second section of the chapter) *does* have some claim on the attention of economists, in particular those members of the heterodox community who share the critical realists' belief in the importance of ontological issues. Such economists typically choose to express their theories discursively, regarding natural language as a more suitable medium for articulating their insights into the working of the socio-economic world than the formal mathematical dialect preferred by orthodox economists. However, this preference for a verbal approach provokes from orthodox economists the accusation that because heterodox economics eschews the deductive mathematical models that orthodox economists regard as the hallmark of hard science, it must be imprecise, unrigorous, atheoretical and even nihilistic. The critical realist account of naturalism is significant in this context because it provides heterodox economists with rhetorical resources or arguments that can be used to rebut this line of criticism by showing that it is based on a flawed conceptualisation of the natural sciences.[4] If natural science is properly understood, so it will be argued, then it becomes apparent that the discursive approach preferred by many heterodox economists does not fall short of the standards of rigorous theorising set by the natural sciences (see the third section of the chapter below). The case study presented in the fourth section suggests that by helping to facilitate a discursive approach, critical realism's account of naturalism can make an important difference to heterodox economics, for it is only by retaining their preferred language that heterodox economists are able to do justice to their insights about the socio-economic world.

The possibility of naturalism

Naturalists argue that in certain crucial respects the study of nature and of society proceed in identical fashion. The issue of naturalism, then, turns on the question of whether it is possible to show that at a suitable level of generality common elements are indeed to be found in the investigation of the natural and social realms.

The critical realist account of the ontology of the natural world arises out of an analysis of the role of experimentation in the natural sciences. The premisses of the critical realist argument are twofold. Firstly, it is observed that the vast majority of empirical generalisations or regularities that are held to be significant in science occur only within the confines of scientific experiments. Secondly, the results obtained through the use of controlled experiments are nevertheless applied successfully in situations outside the experimental set-up where sharp, stable empirical regularities are not widely in evidence. Critical realists suggest that these observations can be rendered intelligible only if it is acknowledged that the natural world is both *structured* (consisting of structures which are ontologically irreducible to actual events and people's experiences of them) and *intransitive* (existing and acting independently of their identification by scientists) (Bhaskar 1997:33–7).

Critical realists portray natural science as an endeavour whose aim is to identify and illuminate the causes of observable events and states of affairs. The essence of science, critical realists aver, lies in the movement from a knowledge of some empirical phenomenon to a knowledge of the mechanisms that gave rise to it. It follows from this that the possibility of naturalism hinges on the extent to which it can make a comparable move in the process of illuminating the objects of the social realm. Now, critical realists are emphatic that the feasibility of naturalism can be ascertained only after examining the nature of socioeconomic reality to see if their account of explanation in the natural sciences also has resonance for the study of socio-economic reality (Lawson 1997:53; 1999:220–1). The *a priori* imposition on the socio-economic domain of methods or modes of explanation developed in the natural sciences is anathema to critical realism, central to which is the claim that research is more likely to be productive if the tools with which it is conducted are fashioned to suit the nature of the subject matter under investigation. To this end, critical realists set great store on the study of socioeconomic being or ontology. Philosophical arguments are employed in order to derive an account of the nature of socio-economic reality. The insights obtained are then used to characterise the methods and mode of explanation appropriate for studying the socioeconomic world and thereby to determine the possibility of naturalism.

The premisses of the critical realist analysis of the socio-economic world, like those on which the critical realist account of nature is based, are twofold. The first is the *ex posteriori* observation that in the socio-economic world there is a paucity of sharp, stable event regularities of the following, general form '[W]henever event or state of affairs *x*, then event or state of affairs *y*' (Lawson 1997:70). The socio-economic world is an open system. The second premiss is the (widely accepted) belief that people are able to choose which course of action they will follow. Critical realists hold that it is analytic to the notion of choice that a person may always have done otherwise than he or she in fact did, implying that if in circumstances *x* the person chose to do *y*, then (s)he could have chosen to undertake some other course of action not-*y*. In other words, the reality of human agency presupposes that society is an open system, that is, one in which event regularities do not obtain. And it is the reality of human choice, so understood, that critical realists regard as the principal cause of the absence of sharp, stable event regularities in the socio-economic world.

Critical realists build on this line of reasoning by maintaining that if people do indeed enjoy the capacity to choose, then human action must be intentional under some description; that is, it must be possible to give an account of people's actions in terms of their beliefs and desires. Critical realists go on to claim that a prerequisite of intentionality is that people are (to a certain extent) knowledgeable both about their objectives and about how to pursue them. Such knowledgeability presupposes the existence of objects of knowledge that are sufficiently enduring for agents to come to know them. And the *ex posteriori* observation that the social world is open suggests that objects displaying the requisite degree of longevity

must be non-empirical (Lawson 1997:30–1). More specifically, these objects take the form of social structures that are ontologically irreducible to empirical events and any contingent constant conjunctions. That these objects are *social* is apparent from the fact that their continued existence ultimately depends on the exercise of intentional human agency. According to critical realists, social structure and human agency are internally related; each is a necessary condition for the other. People constantly draw upon (pre-existing) social structures in order to act and, taken together, people's actions subsequently either reproduce or transform those structures (Lawson 1997:56–8, 166–70).

This picture of society yields a metaphysics that divides the socio-economic world into three distinct ontological realms: the empirical (sense experience and impression); the actual (actual states of affairs, events, people and their practices); and the real (which includes the empirical and the actual, together with a domain of underlying social structures). Thus, the metaphysics to which critical realists subscribe suggests that socio-economic reality is *structured* in the same way as the natural world. Furthermore, the fact that at any given moment in time social structures pre-exist human agency (including the activity of social researchers) implies that socio-economic reality is not simply an artefact of social scientific research; that is, socio-economic reality is *intransitive*. The model of explanation sponsored by this picture of socio-economic reality implies that explaining some socioeconomic phenomenon of interest consists in giving an abstract, discursive and fallible account of its causes. More specifically, explanation proceeds first of all by identifying the practices responsible for the phenomenon under investigation, before then going on to uncover the social structures that make those practices possible, along with any unconscious psychological factors which motivate them (Bhaskar 1989:36; Lawson 1997:56–8, 191–271).

As critical realists see things, then, the socio-economic world can sustain the same metaphysics and model of explanation as the natural world. Most notably, viewed at a sufficiently high level of abstraction, it is apparent that explanation in the social sciences takes exactly the same form as explanation in the natural sciences, involving the identification of the underlying causes of the explanandum. In other words, critical realism supports the possibility of naturalism. And by suggesting that there is a single logic of explanation common to the study of both nature and society, critical realism suggests that the latter can be scientific in precisely the same (abstract) sense as the former (Lawson 1997:20, 34–5, 56–7, 60, 126).

Even if the arguments set out above are accepted, the question which arises is: so what? If the critical realist account of social science can be established without reference to the study of the natural world, why bother with the natural sciences at all? In short, why bother with naturalism? In the remainder of the chapter I will respond to these questions by exploring how the possibility of naturalism can make a difference to the ability of heterodox economists to pursue their preferred programmes of research.

The significance of naturalism

In order to appreciate the significance of naturalism for economics, it is necessary to consider for a moment the current state of academic economics. At present, the discipline of economics is dominated by a mainstream or orthodoxy that insists on the use of formal mathematical models in economic analysis. Critical realists argue that the various mathematical techniques and substantive assumptions utilised in orthodox economics reflect a longstanding commitment to deductivism, that is, a methodology which dictates that socio-economic phenomena should be analysed or 'modelled' in terms of theoretical results deduced from sets of axioms and assumptions of the form 'whenever these conditions, then that outcome (or distribution of outcomes)'. For critical realists, the adherence to a deductivist methodology is analytic to orthodox economics (Lawson 1997:86–107, 69–85; 1999:223–33).

In the eyes of critical realists, deductivist methods of the type that dominate orthodox economics are largely inapplicable to the socio-economic world. While regularities between (sets of) actualities of the form 'whenever these conditions, then that (set or spread of) outcome(s)' are central to deductivism, we have already seen that *ex posteriori* observation reveals the socioeconomic world to be an open system in which such regularities are few and far between. The paucity of regularities displaying the strictness presupposed by orthodox economics leads critical realists to be extremely sceptical about the relevance of such models to the socio-economic world (Lawson 1997:70–1).

This scepticism is heightened by the fact that because the socio-economic world is open and–at least in part–holistic, closed-system modelling almost invariably yields a distorted picture of socio-economic phenomena. The reason for this lies in the fact that in order to facilitate the deduction of theoretical results, it is necessary to make a number of closure assumptions that eliminate various possible sources of indeterminacy from the system under investigation. Firstly, the deducibility of outcomes requires that socio-economic agents are modelled as if their behaviour is *determined* by their preferences and the constraints they face. Consequently, as Martin Hollis (1994:185–6) puts it, '*[h]omo economicus* is a *very* mechanical individual, a mere throughput between given preferences and an automatically computed rational choice'. Such a mechanistic model of human behaviour, designed as it is to ensure that there is just a single course of action which a rational agent will countenance in any given circumstances, effectively denies the possibility that an agent may do otherwise than (s)he in fact did, and therefore embodies no more than an illusory notion of choice (Lawson 1997:8–10, 78–9, 98–102). Secondly, deductivism also requires that the actions of individual agents translate into a determinate outcome at the aggregate level. This can be guaranteed if it is assumed that the socio-economic world is atomistic, so that people's actions combine mechanically to produce an aggregate outcome that is no more than the additive sum of their individual behaviours. However, if (as critical realists argue) the socio-economic world is highly internally related, then models which presuppose that it is atomistic ignore an important aspect of socio-economic reality (Lawson 1997:80–1, 98–9, 164).

For critical realists, then, the neglect of the openness and internal relationality of the socio-economic world displayed by orthodox economics implies that it provides a highly distorted account of socio-economic reality. The dearth of stable closures in socio-economic life, when viewed in conjunction with the inability of deductivist models to do justice either to the reality of human choice or to the existence of internal relations, leads critical realists to conclude that the applicability of orthodox economic models to the socio-economic world is distinctly limited (Lawson 1997:19–20, 108–133).

The fact that orthodox economics has persisted with a methodology that is so inappropriate for its subject matter contrasts sharply with critical realism's concern to employ methods that have been tailored to suit the nature of the socio-economic world. The neglect of ontological issues displayed by mainstream economics leads critical realists to conclude that the former is not realist enough (Lawson 1997: xii–xiii). However, the failure of orthodox economics to engage in explicit ontological reflection is not representative of the discipline as a whole. On the contrary, much of *heterodox* economics has long shared critical realism's ontological orientation. Many (though not all)[5] Austrian, feminist, institutionalist, Marxist, post-Keynesian and social economists emphasise the importance of ensuring that the analytical tools employed by social scientists are tailored to suit the nature of socioeconomic reality. Accordingly, heterodox economists have reflected a good deal on ontological issues, both in their criticisms of orthodox economics and also in developing their own preferred modes of explanation. Indeed, it is arguable that a good deal of heterodox economics closely approximates the critical realist approach, adopting (at least implicitly) something like the critical realist ontology and account of causal explanation (Lawson 1997: xiii–xiv, xvii; Fleetwood 1999).[6]

Critical realists strive to advance the development of heterodox economics in two main ways. Firstly, by refining the fundamental categories of socio-economic analysis—for example, 'social order' (Fleetwood 1996), 'tendency' (Pratten 1998), 'probability' (Runde 1999) and 'need' (Lawson 2000)—and by providing an account of the relationship between social structure and human agency (Archer 1995). Critical realists argue that their elaboration of such basic concepts can help to make explicit, clarify and so realise the full potential of heterodox economists' intuitions about the socio-economic world. In this way, so it is claimed, critical realism can serve as an underlabourer for heterodox approaches that are able to do justice to the fact that the socio-economic world is structured, intransitive, open and, at least in part, internally related.

However, as Lawson (1999:219–20) has observed, the current state of academic economics is such that, irrespective of how fruitful they may prove to be, approaches that depart from a deductivist methodology are likely to be viewed with suspicion by mainstream economists on the grounds that they do not proceed in a 'scientific' manner. Orthodox economists believe that the use of formal, deductive models characterises natural science and that economic analysis can legitimately lay claim to the mantle of science only if it is conducted in a similar fashion. For orthodox economists, mathematical modelling furnishes economists

with a common, grammatical language that facilitates the rigorous derivation of results by deduction from precisely defined assumptions. The mainstream's predilection for a mathematical language over more discursive styles of theorising reveals itself in the way that approaches which fail to conform to the rules laid down by a formal, deductivist grammar are condemned as 'unscientific', 'unrigorous' and atheoretical ('merely descriptive' or, even more pejoratively, 'nihilistic'), and, as a result, are excluded from the domain of 'proper' economics:

> To a mainstream economist, theory means model and model means ideas expressed in mathematical form […] Mainstream economists believe proper models–good models–take a recognisable form: presentation in equations, with mathematically expressed definitions, assumptions, and theoretical developments clearly laid out […] Theories that do not take this form may not be recognised as 'theory' […] In this way the valorisation of mathematical language constrains what counts as theory in economics.
>
> (Strassman 1994:153, 156)

Heterodox economists of all schools commonly lament the fact that their work does indeed receive the sort of response described by Strassman: Austrians (Rizzo 1993:247–51; Boettke 1997:17, 21), feminists (Strassman 1993a:54–7, 64–5; 1994:153–6; Harding 1999:129–30), institutionalists (Hodgson 1988:74; Samuels 1997:137) and post-Keynesians (Chick 1995:20–3; Dunn 2000:351) have all observed that their work has been condemned as unscientific and excluded from the domain of 'proper' economics on the grounds that it is not couched in the language of formal, mathematical models.

The issue of naturalism, then, is already on the agenda in economics, having been raised to prominence by the efforts of orthodox economists to bolster the status of their own work and to undermine that of heterodox economics. The state of affairs just described constitutes the setting for the second way in which critical realists seek to assist the development of heterodox economics namely by disputing the charge that approaches which eschew a deductivist methodology must perforce be unscientific. Such a claim, critical realists argue, is based on an erroneous account of natural science. To see this, recall that deductivism implies that regularities of the form 'whenever this event or state of affairs, then that (set or spread of) outcome(s)' are central to the scientific enterprise. However, any account that places event regularities at the heart of science runs into grave difficulties when called upon to explain the role of experimental activity in the natural sciences. The fact that most of the event regularities regarded as noteworthy by natural scientists occur *only* under the restricted conditions of experimental control bears the unfortunate implication that the existence of the regularities which (on the deductivist account of science) constitute the laws of *nature* depends on *human* intervention. Additionally, if scientific results of interest are largely confined to the experimental set-up, then deductivism is able to explain neither what governs events outside the experimental environment nor the successful application beyond the laboratory of the results obtained therein.

Only if the deductivist view that scientifically interesting generalisations about nature consist in event regularities is rejected and replaced by something like the critical realist perspective, according to which the objects of science are both structured and intransitive, is it possible to render intelligible the role of experimentation in the natural sciences (Bhaskar 1997:33–6; Lawson 1997:27–8). Furthermore, as we have seen, critical realists suggest that once an adequate conceptualisation of science is adopted then it becomes readily apparent that the causal mode of explanation preferred by many heterodox economists *is* scientific.

What this reveals is that, so far as the project of critical realism in economics is concerned, the issue of naturalism is primarily of rhetorical significance; that is, its importance resides in its implications for the way in which heterodox economists are able to proselytise on behalf of their preferred approach to studying socio-economic life. Heterodox economists, faced with an orthodoxy that denies the legitimacy of their work and attempts to exclude them from the discipline on methodological grounds, can find in critical realism the rhetorical resources–the arguments–required to rebut the charge that they do not employ a scientific methodology. The critical realist account of the possibility of naturalism, by demonstrating that heterodox economic theories can be expressed discursively and yet still be scientific (if science is properly understood), and also by laying bare the specious 'scientism' of orthodox economics, can help heterodox voices to establish the scientific credentials of their work and so gain access to the conversation in the discipline of economics (Lawson 1997: ii).

For critical realists, then, a philosophical critique of deductivism is indispensable to the task of underlabouring for heterodox economics (Lawson 1999:219–21; also see Strassman 1994:156). Perhaps most importantly, as we have seen, critical realism furnishes heterodox economists with rhetorical resources that enable them to establish the scientific credentials of their preferred discursive–as distinct from formal, mathematical–mode of theorising. But why should this matter? What difference does the opportunity to articulate their ideas discursively make to heterodox economists? The answer to this question will be provided in the final section of the chapter, by means of a discussion of a case study carried out on the work of a prominent figure in heterodox economics, namely, the post-Keynesian Paul Davidson.[7]

Language, metaphysics and the insights of heterodox economics

Davidson is a post-Keynesian economist, whose work centres on the importance of radical uncertainty in socio-economic life. The term 'uncertainty' denotes the fact that people may be far from clear about the likely consequences of their behaviour, lacking even a probabilistic knowledge of the outcomes to which their actions might lead. One of Davidson's principal objectives is to shed light on the institutions that have grown up in order to enable individuals to deal with their ignorance of the future.

Davidson's interest in uncertainty stands in stark contrast to orthodox economics, which assumes that people possess at least a probabilistic knowledge of the consequences of their actions. Davidson (1988:329–30) argues that in order to facilitate clear communication with orthodox economists and to persuade them of the importance of uncertainty in socioeconomic life, it is necessary for heterodox economists to articulate their theories about the significance of uncertainty using (what Davidson regards as) the preferred vocabulary of orthodox economics namely the theory of stochastic processes. Otherwise, 'orthodox economists may dismiss such efforts as merely another hand-waving, ill-defined notion which simply muddies the waters of scientific investigation […] as "no theory at all [… and] nihilistic"' (Davidson 1988:329).

Stochastic process theory yields a dualistic metaphysics, offering two categories in terms of which the nature of socio-economic reality may be understood: *ergodic* systems are those in which observable outcomes or events can be fully described in terms of a set of unchanging conditional probability distribution functions; *non-ergodic* systems are all those in which observable events cannot be so characterised. These categories delineate the possible objects of knowledge in the socio-economic world and so, according to Davidson, underwrite 'scientific' definitions of 'knowledge' and 'uncertainty'. To understand how, note that because the categories are defined in terms of observable events or outcomes, the only possible objects of general or 'scientific' knowledge that they admit are patterns of (probabilistic) association between events or, in critical realist parlance, (stochastic) event regularities (Lawson 1997:19).[8] The apprehension of (stochastic) event regularities furnishes people with 'knowledge' of the future because the existence of stable stochastic event regularities implies that the same probability distribution function describes both past and future realisations of economic variables, so that the statistical analysis of *historical* data will yield unbiased estimates of the *future* values of those variables. As Davidson (1989:477–8) puts it, 'The orthodox conception of *'scientific' economic knowledge about the future relationship among observable economic variables* […] essentially involves projecting statistical averages based on past and/or current realisations to forthcoming events'.

Of course, if 'knowledge' is defined in this way, then it can be acquired *only* in an ergodic environment because the stochastic event regularities that constitute the relevant objects of knowledge are by definition found only in ergodic systems. A feature of non-ergodic settings is that the information that can be gleaned from historical data constitutes an inadequate guide to future events, simply because it yields unbiased estimates only of the probability distributions which described events in the past, not of the (different) probability distributions which characterise future events. And it is this inability to acquire even a probabilistic knowledge of the values of future variables that Davidson regards as the distinguishing mark of uncertainty: 'Uncertainty involves an incalculable future […] Scientifically speaking […] *uncertainty about the future* involves a non-ergodic environment […in which] past observations cannot produce information regarding current and/or future events' (Davidson 1989:479; see also 1988:331–2).

Davidson contends that socio-economic reality is largely non-ergodic.[9] Furthermore, according to Davidson (1987:149; 1996:493), 'sensible' people will recognise that the socio-economic world is non-ergodic and is therefore characterised by uncertainty. Davidson adopts a realist methodological stance in this regard, arguing that economists should eschew approaches which simply assume the problem of uncertainty away by modelling people as if they possess an idealised probabilistic knowledge of the future in favour of perspectives that acknowledge the existence of uncertainty and attempt to explain how in actual fact people deal with their ignorance of the future (Davidson 1996:482; McKenna and Zannoni 2000–1:331, 347).

Davidson argues that a number of institutions have evolved which enable people to deal with uncertainty Foremost among these are the institutions of money and of fixed nominal contracts. Money constitutes a hedge against the vagaries of an uncertain future because it provides people with the liquidity required to deal with unforeseen obligations and opportunities. Long-term contractual relations, backed up and enforced by the legal system, enable economic actors to secure a measure of control over their future income and expenditure (in the case of households) and revenues and costs (in the case of firms), thereby providing them with a degree of assurance about the future. Hence, according to Davidson, it is 'sensible' for people both to hold positive money balances and also to enter into fixed nominal contracts as a way of coping with uncertainty (Davidson 1996:482–3, 491, 501–2).

Critical realists would fully endorse Davidson's claim that institutions such as money and contracts play a vital role in facilitating intentional human agency in the face of uncertainty. However, they would have some reservations about the details of Davidson's attempt to account for the existence of money and contracts as institutional devices that enable people to negotiate an uncertain future. As we have seen, Davidson attempts to explain the existence of such institutions as a 'sensible' response to uncertainty, arguing that people facing an uncertain future 'try to form *sensible expectations* which rely on the existence of social institutions that have evolved (e.g. contracts and money) to permit humans to cope with the unknowable' (Davidson 1987:149). Faced with this argument, one might reasonably ask the following questions: What precisely does Davidson mean when he says that it is 'sensible' for people to rely on such institutions? What grounds do people have for doing so? In answering these questions, I shall focus on the *epistemic status* of sensible expectations, attempting to characterise the 'knowledge' that informs and grounds them. In doing so, I will bear in mind Davidson's belief that heterodox economists should express their insights in the preferred language of orthodox economics. Hence, in attempting to define the nature of the 'knowledge' on which the sensible expectations are based, I shall explore the implications of utilising only terms and categories found in the lexicon of orthodox economics.

It soon becomes apparent that any attempt to elaborate on the epistemic status of sensible expectations using the orthodox vocabulary encounters serious difficulties. To see why, recall that because the categories in terms of which the

orthodox vocabulary conceptualises the nature of socioeconomic reality are defined in terms of observable events, the only objects of general knowledge that it admits are event regularities. This implies, of course, that the orthodox vocabulary cannot acknowledge the existence of *any* 'knowledge' whatsoever in non-ergodic settings, for the only possible objects of knowledge admitted by the orthodox vocabulary are by definition absent from non-ergodic environments. Consequently, if one follows Davidson and adopts the orthodox vocabulary, then describing sensible expectations as being based on a 'knowledge' of the future is something of a misnomer because the only meaning of the term 'knowledge' that the orthodox vocabulary can sustain with regard to non-ergodic settings is one which connotes a complete ignorance of the future.

The limitations of the orthodox dialect in this regard have serious consequences for Davidson's ability to sustain his substantive claims about the importance of money and fixed contracts in the economy. The reason is that if Davidson's commitment to the orthodox dialect renders him incapable of saying anything more than that people in non-ergodic settings are completely ignorant of the future, then he cannot provide a convincing explanation of the fact that people hold positive money balances and enter into fixed nominal contracts. For if people have no idea what the future will bring, then they will be unable to discern any link between their own actions and the consequences thereof, in which case there is no reason why they should prefer one course of action (such as entering into a fixed nominal contract or holding money) to any other. And if Davidson cannot say why people have good reasons for relying on money and contracts as a way of dealing with uncertainty, then it can hardly be said that he has succeeded in his attempt to provide a convincing explanation for the existence of such institutions.

The ultimate source of the problem resides in Davidson's commitment to the orthodox dialect. For the latter provides such a meagre, coarse-grained metaphysics that objects of knowledge (such as money and contracts) which do not take the form of (stochastic) event regularities cannot be adequately conceptualised. The set of categories provided by the orthodox vocabulary is one in which an ontological distinction between ergodic and non-ergodic systems underpins an epistemological dichotomy between probabilistic knowledge of the future on the one hand and total ignorance of the future on the other. Hence the orthodox vocabulary embodies a dualistic metaphysics which provides no way of differentiating the various possible objects of knowledge in the socio-economic world in order to show that even where knowledge of one such object (event regularities) is impossible, knowledge of another (social structures) is still attainable and can facilitate socio-economic activity. On the contrary, all that the orthodox vocabulary enables social scientists to say about situations where knowledge of event regularities cannot be acquired is that total ignorance reigns. And, as we have seen, the consequences of the latter conclusion are nihilistic indeed, for the limitations of the metaphysics and epistemology implicit in the orthodox vocabulary robs those theorists who remain committed to it of the capacity to explain important features of the socio-economic world such as the existence of money and fixed nominal contracts.

What this reveals is that the orthodox dialect provides an inadequate vocabulary in which to articulate theories about how agents deal with uncertainty. The language of stochastic processes enables theorists to say no more about a world of uncertainty than that it is non-ergodic. Yet, as we have seen, references to the non-ergodicity of the socio-economic world can mark no more than the beginning of any project designed to explain how people successfully negotiate a world of uncertainty. A satisfactory explanation of how people are able to act in the face of uncertainty requires—as Davidson quite correctly notes—an account of the social structures which have evolved to enable people to deal with their lack of knowledge of the future. However, and this is something that Davidson fails to appreciate, such an account requires a more sophisticated metaphysics than that provided by the orthodox vocabulary, for the latter fails to provide the linguistic resources required for an adequate analysis of the institutions in question. A metaphysics of the requisite sort is to be found, so I would argue, in critical realism. Critical realism does not define the categories in terms of which socio-economic reality is analysed solely in terms of observable events and outcomes, but also includes a category of underlying social structures that are ontologically irreducible to observable events and states of affairs. The availability of this latter category allows social scientists to postulate a domain of non-empirical objects of knowledge in the socio-economic world, thereby enabling them to show that, even if stable stochastic event regularities are absent from the socio-economic world, intentional human agency is possible by virtue of people's knowledge of non-empirical social structures such as money and contracts (Lewis and Runde 1999:51–2).

Moreover, once Davidson's substantive claims about the role of money and contracts are expressed discursively rather than in the orthodox dialect, so that the *structured* nature of those social institutions can be expressed, then his ideas can be seen to be anything but unscientific and nihilistic. For an analysis of how social institutions such as money and contracts facilitate economic activity in the face of uncertainty conforms closely to the critical realist picture (outlined above) of social scientific explanation as consisting in an account of the social structures which make possible some socio-economic practices of interest. The picture that emerges from a critical realist interpretation of Davidson's work is one of a causal explanation that portrays economic activity under uncertainty as the outcome of the interplay between (the efficient causation of) human agency and (the material causation of) social structure. And, as the earlier account of naturalism makes clear, viewed at an appropriate level of abstraction, such an approach exemplifies the same mode of causal explanation that characterises natural science.

Conclusion

Critical realism seeks to advance the cause of heterodox economics in a number of ways. The first is by elaborating a number of important categories that are central to the analysis of the socio-economic world. However—and this leads us to the second way in which critical realism can help to promote the development

of heterodox economics—conceptual work of the sort just referred to must be supplemented by a philosophical critique of the mainstream's methodology if heterodox economists are to be able to retain their own preferred theoretical language in favour of the formal, deductivist dialect to which mainstream economics is wedded. Indeed, the two aspects of the critical realist contribution go hand-in-hand, for, as we have seen, it is possible to elaborate the concepts required to understand an open, stratified world only if the formal, mathematical language preferred by orthodox economists is abandoned in favour of a discursive mode of theorising, couched in natural language. This issue has been well described in the context of feminist economics by Diana Strassman (1993b: 152, 153):

> [A] critical barrier in economics to the incorporation and dissemination of feminist and interpretative thought has to do with restrictions on acceptable language, and the processes by which such restrictions are used to limit disciplinary membership and define acceptable economic practice. These issues extend to the very words that can be used in the discourse of an intellectual community […] A consequence is that feminist and interpretative work in economics must often choose between redeveloping and explaining a panoply of concepts and presenting a more simplified and essentially inadequate exposition of arguments […] In particular, by requiring 'worthy' research to conform to a particular conceptual framework and rhetoric, those with such power are able to constrain the nature of interpretations and texts […In this way] the language of the powerful constrains and influences communication and insight […] hinder[ing] the development of new conceptualisations.

The problems highlighted by Strassman are exemplified in the work of Davidson, whose strategy of expressing his arguments in the orthodox dialect falls foul of the latter's inability to provide the linguistic resources required to substantiate his claims about the importance of money and contracts under conditions of uncertainty. And it seems highly improbable, to say the least, that mainstream economists will be persuaded by theoretical claims that, although expressed in the orthodoxy's preferred vocabulary, cannot in fact be sustained using that terminology.

By demonstrating that heterodox theories can be expressed discursively and still embody the same causal account of explanation as the natural sciences, critical realism's demonstration of the possibility of naturalism can help furnish heterodox economists with the rhetorical resources required to defend themselves against the charge that their work is unscientific and nihilistic. And, in turn, heterodox economics' reclamation of the mantle of scientific respectability facilitated by critical realism can help to make a difference to the capacity of heterodox economics to retain its own preferred language and so do justice to its substantive insights about the socio-economic world.

Notes

1 I am grateful to Justin Cruickshank for exemplary editorial assistance. The responsibility for any remaining errors, ambiguities and stylistic infelicities is mine and mine alone.

2 Archer's (1995) critique of structuration theory for excluding the category of preexisting social structure exemplifies this approach. Examples of recent contributions in this vein from outside the realm of sociology include, *inter alia,* Marsh *et al.* (1999) in politics, Patomäki and Wight (2000) in international relations, and Reed (2000) in management studies.

3 In what follows, the term 'ontology' will be used to refer to the nature of (what exists in) the world, while the closely related term 'metaphysics' will be taken to denote the set of philosophical categories in terms of which that ontology is expressed and analysed.

4 The term 'rhetoric' is used here to denote the use of reasoned arguments in order to persuade an audience of the truth of a particular claim. Arguments to the effect that an acknowledgement of the importance of rhetoric is compatible with realism are to be found in O'Neill (1998) and Lewis (1999).

5 A number of ostensibly heterodox approaches–for example, neo-Ricardianism, analytical Marxism and French intersubjectivism–adopt (perhaps implicitly) a deductivist methodology and are therefore as vulnerable to the critical realist critique as mainstream economics. See, for example, Pratten (1999), Fleetwood (2001) and Lewis and Runde (2001).

6 Detailed exegeses that support this conclusion can be found in Pratten (1993), C. Lawson (1994), T. Lawson (1994, 1995), Fleetwood (1995, 2001) and Runde (2001).

7 For details, see Lewis and Runde (1999).

8 It is worth noting that the ergodic/non-ergodic distinction corresponds closely to that between closed and open systems, respectively, in critical realism. To say that an ergodic system is one in which observable events can be completely described by some invariant conditional probability distribution is just another way of saying that it exhibits event regularities, the one nuance being that the regularities in question are formulated in probabilistic terms (that is, they are stochastic event regularities). Stochastic process theory, in other words, is just another (probabilistic) manifestation of orthodox economics' commitment to deductivism (Lawson 1997:17, 69, 76).

9 The arguments employed by Davidson to justify this claim closely parallel those used by critical realists to support their belief that the socio-economic world is open. Statistical analysis reveals *ex posteriori* that macroeconomic time series cannot be described by a constant probability distribution function; that is, they are not ergodic (Davidson 1996:494–5). And the explanation for the observed non-ergodicity is to be found, Davidson (1996:498–9) maintains, in the changes wrought in the economic environment by the creative choices of economic agents.

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11 A critical realist approach to global political economy[1]

Heikki Patomäki

Introduction

In response to the problems of mainstream Western approaches to international political economy (IPE), such as neo-realism and liberal interdependence theories, Robert Cox (1981, 1983) introduced the neo-Gramscian approach. It turned out to be a quite impressive success. By the 1990s, this approach had become prevalent, at least in many political economy sections of international relations departments in a number of UK universities, besides, for instance, the York University in Canada.

Cox's (1981) original contribution was influenced by Immanuel Wallerstein's world system analysis, but was also articulated, in part, as a criticism of it. Wallerstein (1974) had claimed that for five hundred years, instead of national economies a single, capitalist world economy had existed. He developed a structural-functionalist conception to analyse this totality. Cox (1981) criticised Wallerstein's approach for its positivism and structuralist determinism. In providing an alternative approach, Cox developed more thoroughly historicist concepts such as relations of production, social classes and forces, forms of state, world orders, and hegemony.

A few years later, inspired by Cox's (1987) term 'world political economy', Stephen Gill and David Law (1988: xxii–xxiii) coined a new term, 'global political economy' (GPE).[2] Writing from a neo-Gramscian perspective–like Cox–Gill and Law argued that a political economy analysis should not be narrowly limited to examining diplomatic relations between governments of modern nation-states, which are taken as given, and a few additional actors such as non-governmental organisations (NGOs) and other international organisations. The focus should not be on the actions of a few collective actors, particularly states, but rather on the underlying socio-economic processes and structures. Deeper and larger historical processes (of production in particular) determine, in part, forms of state and world orders. In contrast to Wallerstein, but in accordance with the rising literature on globalisation, Gill and Law (1988:378) also claimed that a rather well-integrated global political economy now existed, 'whereas in the past, there was a less complex international political economy'.

GPE has opened up new opportunities for more fruitful studies of world politics and economy. It is the basic claim of this chapter that critical realism can make a difference by enriching this approach in at least two crucial ways. Firstly, critical realism enables the building of bridges between heterodox economics and GPE. What tends to be lacking in GPE is economic theory proper. GPE scholars have been more successful at analysing power relations in the world economy and, for example, the determination of states' economic policies than they have at studying efficiency, growth, ecological effects of production and consumption, income distribution, inflation, (un)employment, business cycles, exchange rates fluctuations, or, in general, economic crises. However, there is a limit to how far GPE can go without addressing explicitly the problems of economic theory.

Secondly, critical realism can work as a philosophical 'underlabourer' for GPE by deepening basic ontological concepts such as causality, action, structure, power and open systems; by clarifying the epistemology of explanatory modelling and the role of explicit hypotheses and empirical evidence; and by explicating the truly critical moment in social scientific explanations. Critical realism enables both theoretically informed empirical research and practical interventions. Fully-fledged critical realism deems systematic causal modelling and transformative practice as aspects of a larger whole, an integrated set of practices.

In the remainder of the chapter, I first of all make an argument that the neo-Gramscian GPE fails to address the issues of economic theory and lacks adequate concepts of causality, explanation, hypothesis and empirical evidence. Secondly, I explain why the neoclassical orthodoxy in economics has become insulated from all other strands of social sciences, including political economy; and ask whether there are any more open, pluralist and realist approaches in economics, which could enable the building of bridges between GPE and economics. Thirdly, in order to absent the absences of GPE, I introduce the critical realist notions of action, structure, causality and open systems; and the epistemological concepts of falsification, iconic model, existential and causal hypothesis, and evidence. I argue that these and related concepts provide a framework within which GPE can be made more systematic and open to falsification and revisions; and within which economics and political economy could be reunited. Fourthly, by using explanations of the instability of global finance as an example, I take a few steps towards concretising these suggestions in a pivotal contemporary context. Finally, I conclude by outlining briefly the relationship between causal explanations, social criticism and transformative practice.

Realism and GPE

Since reality is changing, so must our concepts. For Cox (1981, 1983), the central historicist concepts of analysis include relations of production, social class, historical social forces (generated by relations of production), power, forms of state, historic blocs, hegemony and world order. In his magnum opus, Cox (1987: Part II,

passim) describes painstakingly the formation of different relations of production, social forces and forms of state throughout world history and how they, in turn, have played a role in shaping the world since the end of the Second World War, particularly within the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) area. Cox's work represents a novel account of the rise and, subsequently, the crisis and demise of the Bretton Woods system.

Gill and others (see, for example, Gill 1993a) have used the concepts introduced by Cox to criticise the conventional approaches of international relations and thereby found a new field, GPE. What the neo-Gramscians try to describe and explain are changes in the forms of state and governance of the capitalist world economy, together with the corresponding economic policy implications. The most common theme has been the neo-liberal transformation that has swept the world since the 1970s. In the 1990s, the main focus of attention was the establishment and locking-in of this neo-liberal transformation. Characteristically, the stories about these changes are outlined in terms of relations of production, historic blocs of social forces, power and hegemony (see Cox 1996; and, for example, Gill 1990, 1991, 1995, 1999; see also the excellent Rupert 1990, 1995).

Although GPE may sometimes, at least in part, rely on some ideas and claims of heterodox economics, the subject matters of these two related disciplines are different. GPE appears to be only indirectly concerned with production, economic efficiency, ecological effects, (un)employment, business cycles, financial crises, or distribution of income, or any of the other traditional topics of economics. These economic developments form the background of interpretations of history rather than the explanandum of studies (see, in particular, Cox 1987: Chapter 8). This may seem to indicate that GPE is, at best, complementary to (heterodox) economics. Of course, to the extent that it can help to explain forms of states and the formation of regimes of regulation–explanations which are crucial to determining economic outcomes–GPE might also improve economic analysis. However, such a use of GPE would presuppose its reunification with economics.

In some respects, neo-Gramscian GPE is close to critical realism. For instance, both share the idea of early Marx that agency and structure are interdependent. Men and women have causal powers to change some of these conditions and structures, but, as Marx (1968 [1852]:96) explained, 'not just as they please, not under circumstances chosen by themselves, but under circumstances directly encountered, given and transmitted from the past'. There are real powers in the social world, not reducible to individuals or discourses, including forces of production (economy) and destruction (military); yet ideas, theories and myths do matter. Also, historicism and the call for pluralism are roughly consistent with critical realism. Cox (1987:8) even mentions that social systems and history are open.

Yet there is little at the level of philosophical reflection that would make this critical realism explicit. Cox's (1983) famous 'essay on method' fails to even mention any social scientific method. In that essay, there is nothing about, say,

open systems, causality, explanation, hypothesis or empirical evidence. As Cox himself states, it is merely an attempt to derive some potentially useful concepts from Gramsci 'for a revision of current international relations theory' (1983:162). Cox (1979:258; 1981:163) even talks about 'historicism' and opposes it to more abstract and systematic forms of knowledge.

Thus, the main method of GPE has been, simply, to tell a historical story of the development of world capitalism by using a set of theoretical concepts and a number of (mostly) second-hand sources. Explicit existential or causal hypotheses are rare (for example, Cox (1987:102) mentions a 'hypothesis' but does not study it). The use of empirical evidence tends to be, for the most part, casual and interpretative, rather than systematic, aiming at the falsification of various hypotheses (although Gill (1990) and Rupert (1995) are also based on original empirical research).

Despite there being some critical reflection on the basic concepts, the following question arises: is any improvement possible in the way that GPE historical stories try to illuminate structural constraints, human choice possibilities and, also, value questions? Can components of the post-Gramscian stories be tested and falsified, whether qualitatively or quantitatively, and can the stories thereby be revised? As Alker (1996:269–70) so poetically puts it, 'is there a way of making world historical accounts empirically revisable while at the same time allowing them to have the reflective character and dramatic force of a tragic morality play or the ironic happiness of a Russian fairy tale?'. Here, I think, explicit critical realism can make a difference.

Moreover, although neo-Gramscian GPE is critical insofar as it unmasks myths, ideologies and power relations, the normative basis of this criticism remains undeveloped. There may be the occasional call for more democratic ways of organising global economy and even some preliminary suggestions (see, for example, Gill 1993b: 17; 1997:223–30; see also Lipietz 1996); nonetheless, it seems that usually the neo-Gramscian 'critical' GPE has been unwilling or unable to cultivate alternatives in any concrete detail. It is in this respect, too, that I believe the notions of critical realism can make a difference. World historical stories, however full of the dramatic force of a tragic morality play, are rather futile if they remain academic exercises without any transformative direction.

The estrangement of positivist economics

Obviously, GPE's neo-Gramscian approach is not responsible for the alienation of economics from the social sciences. The roots of this estrangement run more deeply. The neo-classical orthodoxy in economics has become insulated from all other strands of the social sciences, including political economy. The reasons for this include: (i) that, ontologically, the positivism of classical economics grounded both the capitalist conception of man and the notion of 'invisible hand' leading to the automatic harmony of interests between atomist markets actors; and (ii) that, rhetorically, the mathematical conceptions of neoclassical economics, developed in the late nineteenth century, revolving around the concept of equilibrium,

simultaneously implied the quality of being 'scientific' and reinforced (i). Consequently, the urge to be 'scientific' by studying closed systems of multiple, mostly linear equations in terms of equilibrium has been so strong among most economists that even many heterodox ideas have quickly become re-articulated in these terms—despite, and surely sometimes because of, the ideological loading of the notion of 'equilibrium' in capitalist markets.

Classical orthodoxy

Positivism and orthodox economics are closely related. David Hume articulated the ontological basis of conventional economics in a capitalist market economy, including the empiricist notion of causality as constant conjunctions, and empiricism, both of which accord with the capitalist conception of man (see Patomäki 2002:22–6). If we assume that only sense-perceptions and the mind are real, as Hume did, what will be the resulting social ontology? Society is reduced to individuals (recipients of sense-perceptions and recorders of constant conjunctions), and these individuals become atom-like, constant in their inner structure (there are a few universal principles governing the operation of the human mind). The other side of the coin is, paradoxically, voluntarism. Since there are social arrangements and institutions, such as private property and the sovereign state, they must be explained as outcomes of voluntary actions of individuals (cf. Bhaskar 1978:16, 57; 1986:250–9, 287–308).

Besides its ontological basis, Hume also developed many of the central components of orthodox economics. The 'constant conjunctions' Hume claimed he had found in this field include a simple claim that 'the prices of commodities are always proportioned to the plenty of money' (Hume 1955a [1752]:33). This quantity theory of money was later taken to imply that a free capitalist market economy always tends to full employment.[3] Hume's famous hypothesis of the price specie mechanism (Hume 1955b [1752]) is an application of his quantity theory of money. This hypothesis says that the gold standard ensures that international free trade is always balanced. Under the gold standard, payments for imports and exports are made in gold. Surplus countries would have more gold-money circulating in them and, therefore, rising prices; the opposite would be the case in deficit countries. The specie-flow thereby produces a change in relative prices (hence the name of the hypothesis). Since demand depends on price, the exports of the surplus countries will go down; and vice versa for deficit countries. Markets are self-correcting.

Famously, Hume was followed by Adam Smith and his *Wealth of Nations* (first published in 1776). Smith, who decades earlier as a young student had pleased his twelve-years older mentor Hume by summarising his *Treatise* so insightfully, and who adopted, for example, Hume's theory of interest rates, invented the famous metaphor of the 'invisible hand'. According to this metaphor, an actor may produce unintended effects that are beneficial to everybody.

> He generally, indeed, neither intends to promote the public interest, nor knows how much he is promoting it. By preferring the support of domestic to that of foreign industry, he intends only his own security; and by directing that industry in such a manner as its produce may be of the greatest value, he intends only his own gain, and he is in this, as in many other cases, led by an invisible hand to promote an end which was no part of his intention. Nor is it always the worse for the society that it was no part of it. By pursuing his own interest he frequently promotes that of the society more effectually than when he really intends to promote it. I have never known much good done by those who affected to trade for the public good.
>
> (Smith 1910 [1776]:400)

Rather than serving as a general argument for free trade, this was simply a roundabout way of saying that lifting 'restraints on [the] importation of goods' may *not* do that much harm after all. The invisible hand of markets would replace the visible hand of import controls. Nonetheless, the metaphor was soon generalised to characterise all self-correcting markets. Thus, individual self-interested actions can lead, through self-regulating markets, to order and progress. To make money, people produce things that other people are willing to buy. Buyers spend money on those things that they need or want most. When buyers and sellers meet in the market, a pattern of production develops, resulting in harmony. Smith was taken to say that all this would happen without any conscious control or direction, 'as if by an invisible hand'. The corpus of 'modern economics' has been devised to defend this notion.

Despite the emergence of social atomism and the notion of self-correcting markets, the classical school discussed all aspects of human behaviour simultaneously. Economic problems were tackled under the rubric of moral philosophy or politics. Hume, Smith and their followers were preoccupied with the historical change towards the institutions of a capitalist market society. From Smith onwards, analysis of economic conjunctions and developments involved necessarily an analysis of class relations and law. Moreover, the classical school used their ideas about economic developments to explain colonialism, glory of state, international treaties of commerce, and so on, and to make manifold reform proposals that would have been quite controversial in their time. The classical school never intended to build a separate, compartmentalised discipline of 'economics'.

However, David Ricardo's *Principles of Political Economy and Taxation* (1817) may be seen as the beginning of what we now regard as modern economics. Ricardo–a controversial, liberal-minded figure in his time–was a deductive thinker who used drastically simplifying assumptions, systematic thought experiments and 'moved without hesitation from premise to conclusion' (Burtt and Everett 1972:71). Ricardo's models tended to abstract away from history, law, international power politics or anything that might intervene with the laws of his models. It took, however, sixty years before Ricardo's methodology was formalised within neo-classical economics; and some one hundred years before it was canonised as the

methodology of modern economics–particularly in the Anglo-American world, for it remained disputed or unaccepted in many other places.

Neo-classical fundamentalism

The basics of the contemporary neo-classical orthodoxy were forged in the late nineteenth century, and most elements had surfaced by the beginning of the First World War. Augustin Cournot, Stanley Jevons, Alfred Marshall, Leon Walras and Vilfredo Pareto developed notions such as marginal utility and marginal costs, elasticity of supply and demand curves, and the general equilibrium analysis of price-determination. From the outset, the standard approach was to start from the assumptions, however arbitrary, that reinforced the laissez faire conclusions of Hume and Smith. The success of the neo-classical revolution stemmed from the fact that it simultaneously safeguarded the kernel of the classical laissez faire orthodoxy and made it appear scientifically grounded. The key, it was presumed, was in understanding the way the price mechanism functions in an economy with many consumers, producers and commodities. How does the price mechanism guarantee an optimal allocation of given resources? On what conditions does the system have a unique and stable equilibrium? The price mechanism could be studied by using formal methods derived, first and foremost, from probability theory, differential calculus and Newtonian mechanics.

Once the conceptual basis was established, neo-classical economists could focus on studying the mathematical properties of the different systems of price-determination by using increasingly sophisticated mathematical and technical tools. This shift of focus had three, very far-reaching effects. Firstly, in contrast to the classical political economy of Adam Smith, Thomas Malthus, John Stuart Mill *et al.,* the neoclassical economy was regarded as totally separate from the rest of society (and, implicitly, assumed to be concomitant with the area of a nation-state). Secondly, the practical real-world problems of the classical economists faded into the background and economics developed as something akin to a branch of mathematics (see, for example, Backhouse 1994:195–220). Thirdly, the more the neo-classical economists began to focus on the formal mathematical properties of various hypothetical 'economies', the more the conceptual foundations of their narrow and specific approach began to appear to them as self-evident.[4] For instance, Keynes's general theory was quickly transformed into a formal IS-LM apparatus[5] (Hicks 1937), which conveniently made the Keynesian theory just a special case of the orthodox theory.

Explanatory irrelevance, stemming from impossible, contradictory and untrue assumptions, was well compensated for by the certainties of 'science' and a rather fundamentalist belief in the orthodoxy (see Keen 2001). Furthermore, and in particular since the late 1950s, this situation has benefited from abundant funding and increasing political influence. Thus began the transnational and transdisciplinary imperialism of neoclassical economics (see, for example, Hodgson 1994b). After having first isolated economy from society, the neo- classical economists were soon unable to see anything but quasi-formal systems of atomist,

calculating transactions everywhere. The positivist approach of neo-classical orthodoxy, according to which atomist economic men make utilitarian, standardised transactions in closed systems, was subsequently claimed to be 'applicable to all human behaviour' (Becker 1976:8; for systematic criticism, see Archer and Tritter 2000).

The implicit realism of heterodox economics

It is no wonder that the mainstream of neo-classical economic theory has seemed extraneous to global political economists. To them, it appears to be not only esoteric but also, in terms of explanation, irrelevant. However, since J.C.L. Simonde de Sismondi, who coined the term 'economic orthodoxy' in the early nineteenth century, many strands of heterodox economics have been based on *realist intuitions*. Often, realist intuitions have amounted to a criticism of economic theory in the name of common sense or an empirically corroborated realism of assumptions. However, in the Marxist tradition at least, such intuitions have also resulted in a quest to go beyond appearances, to delve more deeply into the historically evolving social relations and complexes.

Like De Sismondi, Karl Marx never explained his philosophical position on realism, but he did use concepts such as structures, relations and laws in a rather realist sense. Bhaskar (1979:88) argues that Marx was a proto-critical realist, and explicates his theory of emancipation in terms of Marx's logic of explanation, which was set out in *Capital I*.

> For Marx vulgar economy merely reflects the phenomenal forms of bourgeois life. It does not penetrate to the essential reality that produces these forms. But it is not just laziness or scientific 'bad faith' that accounts for this. For the phenomenal forms that are reflected or rationalized in ideology actually mask the real relations that generate them.
>
> (Bhaskar 1979:88)

This is a very important point. Perhaps there are *social relations,* which generate both many economic phenomena and the phenomenal forms of capitalist market society, such as the ontological and theoretical underpinnings of both the classical and neo-classical orthodoxy. But what exactly are those social relations? There is a limit to how far Marx can take us in answering this question. As far as Marxist economics is concerned, it has been plagued by the labour theory of value and the consequent transformation problem: how do we get from the values to the prices? Moreover, although Marx may have appeared to be a scientific realist about social structures, relations and laws, many of the conditions for critical realism did not exist in the nineteenth century (for more detail on these conditions, see Bhaskar 1991:139–41). Although it may provide many interesting ideas and hypotheses, Marxist economics is thus unlikely to fill the lacuna in GPE. This holds true, I think, even when the focus is more on unequal exchange than on the relations of production and the consequent appropriation

of surplus value (see, for example, Emmanuel 1972; or as presupposed by Frank 1979; Wallerstein 1979).

Also, non-Marxist critics of orthodox economics and laissez faire capitalism seem to have shared realist inclinations. Although he did not have the critical realist concept of open systems, Keynes, like Thorstein Veblen (1978 [1904]) before him, emphasised that the future is open and must also remain unknown in the calculations of the capitalist entrepreneurs and financial actors. Genuine uncertainty also plays an important role in a capitalist market economy. Keynes warned against applying orthodox economic theory to empirical evidence and political practice. Assumptions such as perfect competition and information, or simplistic and misleading ideas about consumption, investment and production, may yield the convenient result that a laissez faire capitalist market economy is optimally efficient, but usually have very little to do with the world in which we live. Keynes maintained that 'the characteristics of the special case assumed by the classical theory happen not to be those of the economic society in which we actually live, with the result that its teaching is misleading and disastrous if we attempt to apply it to the facts of experience' (Keynes 1961 [1936]:3).

Until the early 1950s, Anglo-American economic discussions centred on the interpretation and validity of Keynes's general theory. John R.Hick's (1937) interpretation, which was in fact based more on his own earlier research than on Keynes's classic, became gradually prevalent. Hicks reinterpreted the basic Keynesian ideas in terms of neo-classical economics and its equilibrium analysis, which resulted in the famous IS-LM apparatus. Others, such as Paul Samuelson, took as their basic task the building of bridges between neoclassical economics and Keynesian theory. Soon it became a standard argument that 'macroeconomics' without 'micro-foundations' is futile. The result was the reinforcement of neo-classical conventions. As Keen (2001:154) puts it, 'macroeconomics, when it first began, bore little resemblance to microeconomics. Fifty years later, macroeconomics is effectively a branch of microeconomics.' What started as a call for realist assumptions ended up as a reinforcement of orthodoxy under the rubric of 'assumptions do *not* matter'. But if assumptions do not matter, what does?

During the last decades of the twentieth century, the neo-classical orthodoxy–based on irrealist assumptions and a methodology best suited to closed, linear systems–prevailed. Not everyone has accepted, however, the idea that assumptions do not matter. Keen (2001:305–13), for instance, takes up four important existing alternatives: (i) post-Keynesian economics, perhaps the most important alternative, which remains faithful to many of Keynes's original ideas; (ii) Sraffian economics, which has built economic models based on Piero Sraffa's critique of neo-classical economic theory, but is less well founded than post-Keynesian economics; (iii) complexity theory, which applies chaos theory to dynamic economic modelling; and (iv) evolutionary economics, which employs concepts such as diversity, environment and adaptation in its analysis of economic problems.

In addition to these four schools of economic thought–together with the classical thinkers such as Marx, Veblen and Keynes–there are a number of contemporary researchers working on global economic problems who believe that assumptions matter and that they must be realistic, one way or the other. These iconoclasts include empirical radicals such as Susan George (1976, 1988, 1999), who, however, usually does not directly address the general problems of economic theory; and a few heterodox economists such as Joseph Stiglitz (see, for example, 1981, 1992, 1995, 1998), who, despite his unorthodox views, tends to take for granted the positivist methodology of economics, with its deep ontological assumptions of atomism and closed systems. Limitations notwithstanding, both could provide useful resources for GPE. Also, it is worth noting certain forms of radical political economy, some of which lean towards neo-classical methodologies (Bowles and Gintis 1998), and some towards explicitly realist methodologies. (for a sympathic and reconstructive realist critique see, Sayer 1995); and which, for instance, others attempt to build a basis for 'economics of institutions' (see, for example, Hodgson 1988, 1994a, 1996). These should provide valuable resources for a refashioned GPE.

Critical realism as a potential framework for the reintegration of economics and GPE

The concerns of economic theory cannot be ignored. What determines economic efficiency and growth? What causes inflation, or debt problem, or financial crises? What about unemployment? What explains business cycles or changes in the differences in income distribution? Are more fundamental economic–including financial–crises possible, and if yes, under what conditions? What are the socio-economic consequences of the debt problem or a financial crisis? And what are the conditions for the ecological sustainability of economic activities? A GPE that is unwilling or unable to give answers to these kinds of questions is likely to remain a marginal phenomenon–its significance reduced to that of a specific approach within a particular strand of international relations.

Although mainstream neoclassical economics may be rather irrelevant to GPE, perhaps the more realist/heterodox variations of economics can be incorporated into it. I would like to suggest, then, that critical realism in particular can provide a meta-theoretical framework within which an open-ended reconciliation of economics and political economy can occur. In the 1990s, there emerged an animated discussion on critcial realism and economics (see Sayer 1995; Lawson 1997; Fleetwood 1999). This discussion has taken the debate over orthodoxy and heterodoxy a step forward.

What is fundamental in this turn to critical realism is not only philosophical realism per se, but the attempt to articulate a realist conception of causality as both transfactually efficacious powers and the real production of outcomes; and to develop a more well-grounded social ontology, based on concepts such as open systems, action, structure and power. This ontology may therefore provide a common ground for economics/GPE. Epistemologically, critical realism also

implies a quest for more pluralist, yet systematic explanatory modelling, involving explicit hypotheses, a reflective use of metaphors and narratives, and an assessment of empirical evidence. This methodology makes it possible to relativise, analyse and assess any claim made in economics/GPE, and thus to integrate different claims and, simultaneously, to maximise the capability for learning, innovation and new syntheses.

The ontological contribution of critical realism

The idea of neo-classical economics is that economic models can, in principle, predict the future. However, most economists, including Milton Friedman (1953), have failed to notice that they have been trying to apply ideas and methodical tools that are suitable *only for closed systems* of directly observable phenomena. Social worlds, however, are fundamentally open: firstly, the relationship between the causal complexes and those of its external conditions is typically not constant; and, secondly, change and qualitative variation in the objects possessing causal powers–including social actors–are ubiquitous (see Sayer 1992:118–38). Outside astronomy, these systems can be found only in the laboratories of classical, Newtonian physicists. Outside the artificially created existential and causal closures[6] there are only open systems. In open systems, which, moreover, typically also include non-observable components and layers, explanation and prediction are *radically asymmetrical;* and meaningful, precise scientific predictions are, in general, impossible (which does not mean that there is no continuity or that nothing can be anticipated). Uncertainty in the Keynesian sense prevails, necessarily.

But if constant conjunctions (empirical invariances) do not occur, what should political economists be looking for? Does not the notion of open systems undermine causal analysis? On the contrary: it is one of the central claims of critical realism that causal analysis must focus on those entities and structures that possess real causal powers, and therefore are capable of producing effects, if triggered, across actual contexts. Causes can be analysed as 'INUS' conditions: Insufficient but Necessary part(s) of a whole that is in itself Unnecessary but Sufficient for the production of the outcome. A distinction can be made between effective and material causes: in short, embodied reasons for actions are effective causes; whereas social structures–including the embodied competencies of actors and the social positions they occupy–are material causes.

We also need a social ontology, specifying the kinds of parts we should be looking for in society. At any given moment, there is always a structured complex of intra- and interrelated entities: actors, actions, rules, resources, practices and social systems (some of which are collective actors such as corporations or states). All these parts should be conceived of as products of ongoing processes. Each has a particular disposition to act in a characteristic way, producing a certain effect. Thus, there are real tendencies in society too. However, any outcome is typically co-determined by the numerous parts of a complex. The intra- and interdependence of some of these parts can create wholes that can be described as mechanisms. However, any part can be in a process of change over the relevant period of time.

This type of social ontology sheds light on the characteristic difficulties and complicatedness of social scientific research. Lawson, however, has argued that it is nonetheless possible to observe 'non-spurious, rough and ready, partial regularities' (1997:204). He calls them 'demi-regs', or 'contrastive demi-regs', because they are usually defined in terms of being in contrast to another outcome, tendency or process. For example: women, in contrast to men, are concentrated in secondary sectors of labour; productivity growth in the UK has frequently been slower, over the last century, than in other comparable industrial countries; and, the growth rate of the world economy seems to have been slowing down steadily since the late 1960s. Thus, systematic patterns can also often be found at the level of actual, observable phenomena. These patterns may provide grounds for forming (always uncertain) expectations about future developments. More importantly, however, these contrasting patterns seem to require a causal explanation. And an explanation must be constructed in terms of the relevant parts, such as the relatively enduring reasons for actions, social structures and mechanisms that have tendentially produced the effects that seem to form the observed–even if often contested–systematic patterns.

The epistemological contribution of critical realism

Models are projective, that is, explicit descriptive and explanatory representations of something real, something that exists outside the conventions of the model (cf. Harré 1970: Chapter 2). The term 'iconic' refers to an image or picture constructed by the model as a symbolic and metaphoric window between two worlds: the world of theories and the real world we are trying to describe and explain, but to which we have no direct, unmediated access. Epistemological relativism prevails, yet rational judgements can be made. An explanatory iconic model in social sciences is a picture of the relevant relational components of a causal complex, or complexes, and also of the possible emergent mechanisms and systems. An iconic model includes existential hypotheses, stipulations of internal relations and action possibilities, descriptive statements, and causal hypotheses. Explanations of social outcomes and effects must not only specify the relevant parts of a whole, or wholes, but also locate them in time and space–and often explain their constitution and development.

The basic scheme of explanation in open systems is fairly simple (see Bhaskar 1979:165) and consists of the following four steps: firstly, the resolution of a complex outcome into its components; secondly, the redescription of component causes in terms of analogies, metaphors, idealisations, abstractions and, in particular, appropriate categories of social ontology; thirdly, an analysis of a number of possible efficient and material causes, some of them perhaps efficacious over large time-space regions, or across many regions; and, finally, the systematic yet reflectively interpretative empirical assessment of these hypotheses about possible causal components, together with the elimination of the weaker hypotheses. Although not a neutral third language, critical realism, when conceived of in this manner, provides at least a systematic framework

within which it is possible to explicate, analyse and assess radically different hypotheses and explanatory models. For instance, whenever neoclassical economics is used to say something about the real world, its stipulations and hypotheses can be respecified in critical realist terms; the same goes, of course, for Keynesian or Marxist theories. These hypotheses can then be set against competing or complementary hypotheses of, per se, GPE. The following examples should illustrate these possibilities:

Neo-classical hypothesis 1 Since the 1970s, policy-makers of the OECD countries have adopted more modern and better economic theories as the basis for their policy-making; it is this that has caused the shift from Keynesian towards more monetarist or orthodox positions.

Neo-classical hypothesis 2 There are also objective reasons for this shift, for the Keynesian theory did not work in the long run; monetarist and orthodox theories explain the world better than the Keynesian theories.

GPE hypothesis 1 Since the 1970s, policy-makers of the OECD countries have adopted monetarist and orthodox positions as a particular, biased response to the perceived problems that have emerged since the late 1960s; this particular and mostly false response is best explained in terms of a change in power relations in favour of transnational capital.

GPE hypothesis 2 There are also objective reasons for this shift, for it originated mostly in changes in the relations of production, which can be summarised as a shift from a Fordist towards a post-Fordist regime of the accumulation of capital.

Economic theories and GPE may thus hold competing explanations concerning, say, major changes since the early 1970s in the economic policies of a large number of countries. However, the four hypotheses listed above are complex and loaded. So, the first step of the explantory process is the resolution of the complex outcome into its components. These components can then be redescribed in terms of an adequate social ontology. What is important in this context is that these hypotheses also lead naturally to questions of economic theory, such as: What caused the higher inflation of the late Bretton Woods era? What explains the slowdown of world economic growth since the 1970s? Whereas the GPE explanation may be apparently stronger in terms of its hypotheses about the shift in economic policies, it is much more implicit and vague about the underlying economic theory. The point is that claims regarding economic theory can be understood as time-space indexed hypotheses about relevant contrastive demi-regs; and as attempts to explain those demi-regs in terms of meaningful social actions, structures, powers and mechanisms. Thereby economic theories, within a critical realism framework, can be re-integrated with variations of political economy, such as GPE.

It is also worth emphasising that there is nothing wrong per se with telling historical stories or combining conceptual work with empirical studies. Social scientific explanations assume the form of an ethico-political narrative, or at least imply such a narrative. The point is to construct explanatory models more

systematically and reflectively. This process must include the articulation of different possible stories and causal hypotheses explaining (roughly) the same phenomenon. In the process of eliminating weaker hypotheses, the plausibility control of assumptions and analysis of other possible theoretical anomalies must play an important role. However, the adequate description of causal components and assessment of hypotheses always requires a great deal of empirical work. Both quantitative and qualitative empirical evidence can be used (see Sayer 1992:172–99). However, qualitative data is primary, even in political economy, and even if it focuses on a world within which quantification is a routine practice. Quantitative data, expressed in terms of magnitudes, is only meaningful when the relevant objects and processes are *qualitatively invariant*. Given the contextual nature of efficient causes (= reasons for actions)–and the ubiquity of qualitative change and variation–qualitative language and methods are needed to identify the relevant structures and causal powers, and to show how and why objects possess these causal powers. In this sense, qualitative data is ontologically primary (for details, see Patomäki 2002:133–7).

Explaining aspects and layers of global finance

Critical realism can facilitate the process of bridging the gap between the basic concepts of economic and social/political theory. As has already been said, however, critical realism is not neutral ground. For instance, critical realism seems to imply replacing mathematical equilibrium analysis, built on concepts inherited from Newtonian mechanics, with causal analysis in open social systems (see also Lawson 1997). Nevertheless, by focusing on concepts such as social action, structure and causal powers, it is possible to redefine elements of heterodox economic theory (in particular) and, then, to use them to enrich GPE, and vice versa.

In the following example, I have used global financial markets to illustrate the difference that critical realism can make.[7] The orthodoxy makes two assumptions: (i) that financial markets are determined by circumstances in non-financial markets (labour, production, consumption, and so on), that is, that markets for credit, stocks and currencies correctly reflect developments elsewhere; and (ii) that financial markets and other markets are in a simultaneous 'equilibrium', or are determined by an immanent equilibrium. Despite Marx's insights into the role of credits and uncertainty in producing economic cycles, he–and especially most of his followers–tacitly assumed that assumption (i) was mostly valid. In contrast to this, heterodox economists such as Veblen and Keynes claimed that credit and secondary financial markets are partially autonomous and in no way synchronised with other markets. Moreover, if left to develop freely, finance can assume power over the way the capitalist market economy works and develops (see Toporowski 2001).

Indeed, it seems as though the world economy, again since the 1970s, has been increasingly dominated by 'mighty finance', *haute finance,* which is co-determining its own values and which also has the power to shape many other

processes. For a critical realist, this looks like a potentially very fruitful initial hypothesis, leading to a number of further research puzzles, one following on logically from the other. Starting with a problem of economic theory, we should ask: What kinds of mechanisms or causal complexes are producing financial (in)stability and occasional crises? Do financial instability and crises have real causal consequences for the way in which capitalist market economies work? Then, moving on to questions more closely related to those posed within GPE, we should follow up by asking: What powers do financial actors have to transform socio-economic worlds, and to do so to their own benefit? What is the structural power of finance over, say, states' economic policies? Moreover, what are the potential feedback loops that lead to the reproduction and transformation of those structures that tend to produce instability and crises? By studying questions such as these, new falsifiable and revisable models can be specified and, hopefully, better stories about recent world history can be told.

Financial crises

One possible point of departure in the quest to resolve the problem of global finance is an attempt to explain the financial crisis that began in Asia in 1997 and spread to Russia and Brazil in 1998. It led to a loss of perhaps 6 per cent of global output (UNDP 1999:2), to the impoverishment of tens of millions of people (see Hayward 2000), and to the *neo-liberal* restructuration of many of the Asian tigers' (see, for example, Chossudovsky 1998). How should one explain what happened? The first observation to make is that although this crisis was more consequential than any episode since the Depression of the 1930s, it was by no means a unique event. Since the 1970s, there have been some two hundred financial crises, and most IMF members have experienced dramatic currency fluctuations or serious banking sector difficulties at least once. Perhaps there *are* certain characteristic mechanisms or causal complexes that tend to produce these kinds of crises.

The available statistical evidence provides a few indicators, whereby it is possible to identify some relevant contrastive demi-regs about the way, say, the foreign exchange (forex) markets seem to function. For instance, by the 1980s, monthly exchange rate fluctuations had grown three-fold compared to the 1960s (Edey and Hviding 1995). Moreover, wider fluctuations, which can take months or years, have also grown. In the 1980s and 1990s, these fluctuations have also been very steep between major currencies. What is perhaps most noteworthy is the exponentially growing volume of forex trading. This *daily* volume reached US$1.6 trillion in 1998, and has the potential to grow to US$3.6–6.2 trillion by 2010 (estimate based on Felix 1995; BIS 1999a and b). Such trading is a substantial part of the global *annual* GDP, which in 2000 stood at around US$30 trillion. Furthermore, this volume growth seems to indicate that the *power* of financial markets to undermine the economic path of states has grown in a similar fashion.

However, at the same time, a political race has begun to cope with the growth of the power of the financial markets. Alongside the increased transformative capabilities of the financial actors and markets, new countervailing tendencies have emerged. These include the qualitative and quantitative development of monetary interventions by state authorities and multilateral agencies; monetary unification in Europe in particular; homogenisation of economic policies; and the liberal re-regulation of financial markets. In open systems, different tendencies–including conscious attempts to resolve economic problems–can counteract each other and different spatio-temporal processes may overlap, intersect, interlope and/or clash (cf. Bhaskar 1994:67–72). Statistical traces are thus best seen as mere indicators of the sum result of these various processes.

How, then, do financial markets work? What are the essential parts and mechanisms of the markets? What currencies, loans, bonds, shares and other assets are being exchanged around the world and the clock? To answer these questions one can build *an iconic model of the characteristic ways in which financial markets function.* In a critical realist vein, the model I have proposed (Patomäki 2001: Chapter 1) is based on the notion of radical uncertainty in the face of the openness and unpredictability of the future, as well as on the idea that all economic demi-regs, or contingent, tendential 'laws', depend upon transitory institutional arrangements. The model indicates that financial agency is inter- and system-dependent–as its identity, action possibilities and resources are relationally constituted–and that financial decisions must be explained in terms of sensitive trust in developments and highly reflexive strategic considerations.

Although in any given crisis many aspects of both agents and structures might always have been otherwise, a systemic explanation reveals how the *financial multiplication process,* which tends to grow with rather vague and ambiguous connections to the material world of economic developments, is itself a crucial cause of financial instability It is not only that the multiplication process–or, in standard financial terminology, the collective consequences of leverage building, mutual indebtment and rapidly inflating prices–can easily grow into a 'bubble' in particular places and markets, but also that any suspicion of problems and changes can easily trigger the inter- and trust-dependent financial actors to *produce* a crisis. In the mainstream positivist discussions the triggers of crises and the mechanisms that can be triggered have often been confused. Triggers may also be extrinsic to financial markets, while the basic mechanisms are intrinsic. Further confusion is generated by the openness of systems and contextuality of action: many things might have been otherwise in any given episode. Any of these elements can thus be taken up as *the* explanation. The rest of the context is then either reified as exogenous 'facts' or misrepresented.

Power of finance

In explanations of financial crises, a critical factor seems to be the growth of the transformative capacity of finance. Thus perhaps it is worth exploring this power in more detail by studying the financial actors, their rules of action, and their

resources. A study of global *haute finance* can bring previously hidden aspects and layers of global realities to the fore. Some of these aspects are related to the way in which the financial markets work and can create trouble for, or put pressure on, the nation-states.

The heavyweights and market leaders of financial markets can manipulate developments for their own benefit, and even orchestrate attacks against the currencies of major states. The financial markets tend to allocate capital collectively on the basis of shared *neo-liberal* frameworks of analysis of financial prospects (see Sinclair 1994). Moreover, the individual and collective financial actors are not just market players; they have also formed collective associations in order to pursue issues of common concern and interest. These associations claim to have a privileged access to governments all over the world.

Despite the importance of these features, perhaps the most far-reaching finding of the research into the power of financial actors is that when we look at wider developments more closely, we discover, in fact, a number of ongoing processes which are drawing resources away from the non-financial sphere towards the financial markets (Patomäki 2001: Chapter 2). Financial multiplication would be rather impotent without the *continuous extraction of further resources* into the system.

This extraction of further resources assumes a number of forms. Global wealth is increasingly concentrated in the hands of 'high-net-worth-value' individuals, who are prone to invest in the financial markets. Pensions are funded and privatised (for an excellent analysis of this issue see Toporowski 2000:47–90). In the context of growing insecurities and risks, partially caused by *neo-liberalism,* private insurance companies attempt to make affluent individuals cover every aspect of their lives with insurance premiums, some of which have become explicit investments in the financial markets. New, 'emerging markets' are created and opened, with fresh resources and investment opportunities. And because of the power of finance, a drive to make non-financial corporations concentrate on maximising short-term shareholder values has emerged, thereby accelerating financial multiplication.

Seen from this point of view, even financial crises can be instrumental to the growth of the system. For example, the IMF—and ultimately, therefore, the states in trouble—may give financial assistance to the actors that have found themselves in difficulties. Thus, in effect, this means that a particular financial crisis has resulted in new and fresh resources for global financial markets. Furthermore, the monetary reserves of states have rapidly increased. A large part of these reserves are invested in financial markets, particularly in the dollar-valued US Treasury bonds on Wall Street. This helps, in an essential way, to maintain the process of financial multiplication.

Structural power of finance and hegemony

Quite logically, the next stage in critical realist research into global financial markets should be concerned with explaining the re-emergence of finance (see Patomäki 2001: Chapter 3). *Haute finance* experienced its golden age between the 1870s and

the First World War. In the 1920s, however, global financial markets, *with partially floating exchange rates,* emerged for the first time. This post-war decade was associated not only with booming and interconnected stock exchanges in New York, London and elsewhere, but also with financial innovations and large-scale portfolio investments in the 'emerging markets' of the time, particularly those of Latin America and Eastern Europe. This short-lived era ended in debt crises and the global economic depression of the 1930s. In 1944, the Bretton Woods system was created to replace the remaining nineteenth-century institutions with a system of capital controls and the collective management of exchange rates that were tied indirectly, via the dollar, to gold. The Bretton Woods system represented a partial victory for productivism over financial capital. It imposed significant constraints on the freedom of movement of financial capital, in particular through fixed exchange rates, which were tied to gold via the dollar, and, by mutual consent of states, strict capital controls.

So how did the global financial markets re-emerge? By answering this question it will be possible to shed some light on the underpinnings of the process of continuous extraction of further resources into the financial system, as well as on how and why many economic activities and political aspirations have been subordinated to the power of the increasingly global financial markets. It is here, then, that the GPE studies prove most fruitful. An adequate explanation seems to consist of two overlapping stories about *hegemony*. On the one hand, the hegemonic aspirations of two particular states—principally the US, but also the UK—explain to a large extent the release and development of global finance. On the other hand, the rise and hegemony of *neo-liberalism* and the re-emergence of global finance seem to be essentially connected.

The UK actively developed and encouraged the development of offshore finance. Since the 1950s, the creation of Eurodollar[8] markets, initially in London and offshore facilities—the latter often in former British colonies, and always safeguarded by the institution of state sovereignty (see Palan 1998)—has made it increasingly easy to escape from the rules and regulations of twentieth- and twenty-first-century welfare states. Offshore facilities and tax havens have enabled a partial return to the nineteenth-century practices of laissez faire capitalism. Following Strange (1986, 1998), I believe that despite the huge sums involved in drug trafficking, it is tax evasion, private fraud, financial crime and public embezzlement that are in fact the biggest problems. Moves to offshore finance have aggravated global disparities. Moreover, it was also essential for the US to unilaterally abandon the Bretton Woods system of fixed exchange rates in 1971 in order for it to increase its autonomy and freedom of action (which included the act of financing its spending with an increased supply of dollars to the world economy). Following a series of political decisions influenced by pressure from the US, the World Bank, the IMF and the new offshore financial centres, countries since the 1970s have further liberalised their financial markets.

In the liberalised financial markets—within which actors have been reorganised, new instruments created and traditional bank loans turned into bonds—credit

rating, social allocation of capital and globalising media form a panoptic system of power and surveillance that promotes and maintains the hegemony of *neo-liberalism* (cf. Gill 1995). It is this same system of power on which the 'geoeconomic gamble of the US' (Gowan 1999)–loyally supported by the UK (which is dependent on the position of the City of London and offshore financial markets), and more ambivalently accepted by Japan (which has been squeezed between US unilateralism and a liquidity trap caused by a financial crisis)–is based. Thus, the power of global finance also includes the capacity to transform the economic policies of states and, more generally, social worlds. The socio-economic effects of the structurally backed hegemony of *neo-liberalism* are sweeping. The demands and claims to privatise, restrict social expenditure, lower taxes, minimise state intervention, and deregulate first then re-regulate in accordance with the US model (or the wishes of Washington and London) have had effects on the welfare of perhaps most people on the planet.

By starting with a concrete historical episode, such as the Asian financial crisis, the move to construct an adequately deep explanation of such an event in terms of causal mechanisms and complexes, which are efficacious in open geo-historical systems, seems to lead to the gradual uncovering of previously hidden aspects and layers of global realities. Obviously, a critical realist will have to–and can–draw elements of explanations from a wide variety of existing theories, many of which are only, at most, partially or ambiguously (critical) realist. This is in fact the essence of the pluralist process of iconic modelling. Nonetheless, it is those theories that contain some realist elements, such as heterodox economic theories and more realist approaches to political economy, which tend to be the most useful resources–even if some conventional statistical studies can also be helpful.

Explanation, criticism and transformative praxis

I hope by now that I have been able to demonstrate how critical realism can both remedy the lack of economic analysis in GPE and act as a philosophical underlabourer for it. My final point, which I can discuss here only very briefly, is that critical realism enables the making of inferences from explanation to criticism and transformations explicit. The basic idea is, again, simple. Truth is a normative notion, a regulative metaphor, which is necessary for everyday discourses and research alike. The best available explanatory model and story may imply that the competing account T is partially–in some essential regards–false. However, T may be constitutive of or justificatory with regard to some relevant social practices and thus become the next object to be explained. If the explanatory model can be extended to also explain T and its reproduction, both conditions for social criticism are fulfilled: the critical condition ('T is an inferior account') and the explanatory condition ('T can be explained').

Consider the neo-classical hypotheses 1 and 2 presented on page 209. At least as far as the re-emergence of global finance and its role in the (re)production of orthodox economic policies are concerned, these hypotheses–and their underlying

theories–appear essentially false. Can they also be explained? Although answering this question goes beyond the scope of this chapter, I would suggest that, yes, they can be explained. Debates about the governance of global finance are ongoing, and it is precisely the orthodox economic theory that has grounded the liberalisation of finance and, subsequently, defended the neo-liberal arrangements against all attempts to reform them. There is a rather old-fashioned connection between the interests of globalising capital, and financial capital in particular, and this theory. In short, the orthodox theory advocates the maximal freedom of operation for this capital in the name of welfare-maximising 'equilibrium', thus masking its particular short-sighted, myopic interests as universal (it may even be counter-produtive in the longer run for many of these interests, too).

The reproduction of the relevant structures presupposes the acceptance of a false theory. 'The point now becomes, *ceteris paribus,* to change [these structures]' (Bhaskar 1979:67). Against Bhaskar, I have argued elsewhere that epistemological relativism conditions transformative actions, implying, for instance, a preference for communicative action and, also, the requirement of the non-violence of words and deeds; and that it is not enough to criticise. A direction, a concrete utopia, has to be specified as well (Patomäki 2002: Chapter 6). Suffice it to say that–differences within critical realism notwithstanding–this theory of emancipation, however specified, would take GPE many steps forward in explicating the basis of social criticism and change.

Conclusion

Critical realism makes a difference because it instigates better and more hypothetical and revisable causal explanations; a synthesis of some of the relevant insights of heterodox economics and GPE; and a truly critical moment of social sciences. Neither heterodox economics nor post-Gramscian GPE is quite enough for these tasks, although both can helpfully clarify many of the existing processes and explanatory possibilities.

Critical realism avoids reifying the explanandum by seeing it not as an instance of 'invariances', but as a contingent outcome of geo-historically changeable mechanisms and complexes, which are transfactually efficacious in open systems. One step towards an explanation (for example, of particular financial crises) leads to another (for example, of the power of global finance). Aspects of a whole, and its deeper layers, are thereby uncovered step by step. The point is not, however, only to unmask ideologies and relations of domination, but also to emancipate actors from the consequent absences and constraints by proposing better alternatives and realistic ways of realising them.

The critical explanation of the power of global finance, together with a vision of the possible reform of global financial markets, illustrates only a possibility. Any phenomenon of the global political economy can be submitted to a similar process of understanding, explanation, criticism and of envisioning some realist alternatives.

Notes

1 Stefano Guzzini, Jamie Morgan, Teivo Teivainen and Chris White gave a series of very useful comments on earlier versions of this chapter. Justin Cruickshank did not let me take the easy route and has thus forced me to write a more original work. Finally, on 15 October 2001, the audience of a guest lecture given in an 'IR Research in Progress' seminar, at the University of Sussex, gave me some most valuable feedback; particular thanks should go to John McLean, Ronen Palan and Kees van der Pijl, Although I have carefully tried to take on board most of these comments, the usual disclaimers apply. I am also thankful to Pauline Eadie and Phoebe Moore for their research assistance.

2 For a very similar programmatic statement for IPE, by the editors of the *Review of International Political Economy,* see Amin *et al.* (1994). It remains a mystery why they decided to retain the term 'international' as a prefix to political economy, instead of 'world' or, perhaps more problematically, 'global'.

3 The mathematical formula that was made explicit (and famous) by Irving Fisher and others in the twentieth century holds that MV=PT, where M is the quantity of money, V is the velocity of circulation of each unit of money, P is the price level, and T is the volume of transactions.

4 As so often happens, the originators were much more open-minded than the followers of (what was quickly to become) the orthodoxy. In his seminal *Principles of Economics,* Marshall (1920 [1890]) put all his graphical and mathematical presentations into footnotes and appendices to avoid the temptation of replacing conceptual analysis and concrete problems by formal, mathematised 'theory'. He emphasised that good economics must be 'closely in touch with the actual conditions of life'; that '[t]he pursuit of abstractions is a good thing, when confined to its proper place'; however, 'it is obvious that there is no room in economics for long trains of deductive reasoning'; and, moreover, 'if we shut our eyes to realities we may construct an edifice of pure crystal by imaginations, that will throw side lights on real problems' (1920 [1890]: 644–5). Hence, although Marshall's book is the magnum opus of neo-classical orthodoxy, he would not have accepted the fundamentalism of many of his followers; or the way in which they have distanced themselves from conceptual work and, simultaneously, real-world problems of economic policy.

5 The IS curve represents equilibrium in the goods market. The equilibrium condition (aggregate demand equals aggregate supply) can be written as

$$I=S$$

which means planned investment (I) equals planned savings (S); but this *may or may not* imply full employment. Thus the name IS curve.

The LM curve represents equilibrium in the money market. Money demand depends on income, usually represented by a simple equation

$$Md=L(r,Y)$$

Thus the name LM curve.

The model is about studying simultaneous equilibrium in two markets, thus the name IS-LM model.

6 The point of these artificial closures is to isolate the *mechanisms, laws and explanatory structures* that are also causally efficacious—capable of transfactually producing outcomes—in the open systems of nature.

7 For more detailed examples and explanations, see Patomäki (2001).
8 'Eurodollars' are US dollars in the hands of persons and institutions domiciled outside the US (originally in London, which, of course, is in Europe). Any currency can become a 'eurocurrency'; and eurocurrencies can also be in the hands of persons or institutions domiciled outside Europe.

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12 Explaining global poverty

A realist critique of the orthodox approach[1]

Branwen Gruffydd Jones

The global poverty crisis hits the headlines regularly these days, along with increasingly fervent statements of commitment to meet internationally agreed targets, to battle, fight and eradicate poverty–once and for all, it sometimes seems.[2] Such assertions are characteristically made in moralistic language. Poverty is typically referred to as an anonymous, external threat or evil force, against which the whole world–governments north and south, citizens rich and poor, even the private sector–are united in fighting. Campaigns for debt relief are couched in terms designed to appeal to the 'generosity' of rich countries; and in a similar fashion non-governmental organisations (NGOs) such as Oxfam appeal to the compassion and generosity of individuals in the West.[3] A recent report compiled by the UN, World Bank, IMF and OECD finds (with apparent surprise) that

> the number living on less than $1 a day has actually grown, to 1.2bn from about 1bn in 1995. The World Bank admits that the number will not fall in the next eight years unless something is done.
>
> (Elliott and Brittain 2000:13)

So what is to be done? Kofi Annan, the UN Secretary General, urges that

> The world's richest states must open their markets and show greater generosity in debt relief to help revitalise the global drive to beat poverty […] developed countries must recommit themselves to battle against human misery.
>
> *(ibid.)*

What is the understanding of the causes of poverty underlying this overtly moral and passionate discourse? What is the nature of its social analysis? The aim of this chapter is to provide a critique of the orthodox approach to explaining poverty from the perspective of critical realism. In doing so, it attempts to respond to Julian Saurin's assertion that the study of global poverty requires a distinct approach which draws on critical realism (Saurin 1996:662). It is argued here that a particular, dominant conception of the condition of poverty prevails today, to the extent that it can be seen as an *orthodoxy* (cf. Bourdieu 1977:168). The chapter

begins by characterising this orthodoxy. It examines the way in which social phenomena are conceptualised and explained, and identifies the unexamined but implicit assumptions underlying the orthodoxy. Having identified these assumptions–namely empiricism and social atomism–and having sketched out the alternative and more adequate ontology and epistemology of critical realism, the chapter addresses the question: what difference does a critical realist approach make to explaining global poverty?

Characterising the orthodoxy

There is a particular way of producing knowledge about the social world that is dominant, within academia and beyond. It can be seen clearly when examining society's ideas about poverty–ideas about poverty within societies, and more specifically ideas about the phenomenon of global poverty. An examination of the way in which the orthodoxy conceives of and explains poverty reveals the basic assumptions about the world upon which the orthodoxy rests. The claim to have identified an orthodoxy refers to the level of method, and the assumptions about the world implied by this method (cf. Lawson 1999:3–4).

The analysis of global poverty undertaken by the World Bank is an exemplar of the orthodox approach. The World Bank is particularly important and its analyses are characteristic of an approach that is prevalent on a much wider scale. The World Bank is the world's hegemonic development institution, and the agenda and advice of the World Bank is central to any orthodox understanding of poverty and attempts at poverty alleviation. Although the Bank's particular position has varied over time,[4] its general influence has increased steadily to its current hegemonic standing. The sheer volume of its output of publications is testimony to its efforts in this regard. As Marc Williams observes:

> The World Bank's resources are not only financial. Crucial to the Bank's role as a development agency is its function as a research institute. The Bank is in the forefront of thinking on development issues and its expert staff of economists, engineers and other professionals produce highly valued country studies, sectoral analyses and influential research publications on issues such as debt, capital flows and trade liberalisation. The Bank's output on development issues are frequently at the forefront of development thinking and set the trends in thought.
>
> (Williams 1994:122)

Since the early 1990s, the Bank has reintroduced poverty as a central concern (Williams 1994:119); indeed, the World Bank Group has adopted the slogan 'Our dream is a world free of poverty'. The theme of the 1990 *World Development Report* (World Bank 1990) was poverty. Examination of this key document reveals features which are definitive of the Bank's methodological approach, and of the orthodoxy more broadly.

The World Bank's analysis of poverty

Chapter 2 of the 1990 *World Development Report* on poverty is entitled 'What do we know about the poor?'. It begins as follows:

> Reducing poverty is the fundamental objective of economic development. It is estimated that in 1985 more than one billion people in the developing world lived in absolute poverty. Clearly, economic development has a long way to go. Knowledge about the poor is essential if governments are to adopt sound development strategies and more effective policies for attacking poverty. How many poor are there? Where do they live? What are their precise economic circumstances? Answering these questions is the first step toward understanding the impact of economic policies on the poor […] Lifting them out of poverty will depend to a large extent on a better understanding of how many poor there are, where they live, and, above all, *why they are poor*. None of these questions turns out to be straightforward.
>
> (World Bank 1990:24, 25; emphasis added)

So, why are they poor? How does the World Bank try to explain poverty? The next section of the report presents an extended analysis under the heading The characteristics of the poor', which examines data taken from detailed household surveys, conducted in different countries, 'to estimate the number of poor people and to establish what is known about them' (1990:24). The characteristics examined include geographic location, type and quality of the physical environment; 'demographic characteristics' such as gender, and size and composition of the household; ownership of 'assets' such as land and 'human capital' (education, health); occupational activities and main source of income; position in the surrounding society; and how the poor spend their incomes. This exercise in data analysis produces findings such as those listed below:

- Poverty as measured by low income tends to be at its worst in rural areas […] The problems of malnutrition, lack of education, low life expectancy, and substandard housing are also, as a rule, more severe in rural areas.
- Households with the lowest income per person tend to be large, with many children or other economically dependent members.
- The poor usually lack assets as well as income.
- Poverty is highly correlated with landlessness […] when the poor do own land, it is often unproductive and frequently lies outside irrigated areas.
- The poor are usually unable to improve such plots, since they lack income and access to credit.
- Agriculture is still the main source of income for the world's poor. We have seen that the greatest numbers of the poor, including the very poorest, are found overwhelmingly in rural areas. Their livelihoods are linked to farming, whether or not they earn their incomes directly from it.
- In many countries poverty is correlated with race and ethnic background.

(1990:29, 30, 31, 32, 33, 37)

Thus, a detailed *description* of poverty is built up from empirical data taken from a variety of countries. On this basis, the report concludes by identifying 'two overwhelmingly important determinants of poverty: access to income-earning opportunities and the capacity to respond' (1990:38). According to this approach, then, the common empirical aspects or characteristics of the condition of poverty constitute the 'determinants' of poverty, and explanation consists of identifying these characteristics by means of the examination of empirical data.

The above extracts reveal defining methodological features of the orthodox approach, and the underlying assumptions about the nature of the world and how it can be known. The model of society implicit within this analysis is a society consisting of individuals and households, within the bounded unit of the nation-state. Poverty is seen as a condition which is distributed among a quantifiable proportion of the overall aggregate collection of people who constitute society. The notion of *individuals* being poor is clear: '[t]he income shortfall […] measures the transfer that would bring *the income of every poor person* exactly up to the poverty line, thereby eliminating poverty' (1990:27–8; emphasis added).

According to this approach, in order to explain why some people are poor it is necessary to identify patterns of correlation within the set of data about different empirical characteristics of the poor. Data about all sorts of characteristics of people and their environment are gathered, in different places, and compared in order to identify regularly recurring patterns of correlation. This procedure allows conclusions of the form: '[a]griculture is still the main source of income for the world's poor […] the greatest numbers of the poor, including the very poorest, are found overwhelmingly in rural areas' (1990:33).

The only things referred to in this exercise are things which can be observed and measured. The only way to explain the existence of certain observable characteristics, or variables, is by reference to other such characteristics. In short, this approach is characterised by empiricism. It is assumed that what exists consists only of what is knowable empirically. Causation, and consequently explanation, is thus conceived of as the constant conjunction of empirical variables.

What's wrong with the orthodoxy?

Recent realist theorising takes issue with such an empiricist account of causality and explanation. This realist critique started with a critique of empiricism in the natural sciences, before moving on to apply the alternative realist model of natural science to social science. At the forefront of such work is Roy Bhaskar. Roy Bhaskar's realist theory of science results from a transcendental inquiry into the ontological and epistemological presuppositions of the possibility and necessity of experiment in the practice of natural science (Bhaskar 1997). It reveals the flaws in empiricism and provides an alternative and more adequate theory of ontology and epistemology For experiments to be both possible and necessary, the world has to be structured, stratified and open, consisting of structured entities with causal mechanisms that combine to generate the phenomena available to

experience. Normally, these structures operate in contingent combination with other structures and are influenced by various prevailing conditions, to the extent that actual outcomes are not the straightforward result of the operation of any single mechanism. Hence normal, everyday observation of the world does not enable identification of the causes of experienced events because of the disjuncture between real structures, the actual events produced, and the restricted range of the events available to experience (that is, the empirical evidence). In other words, if real casual mechanisms were directly observable, then science would be redundant.

In order to identify the properties of any particular generative mechanism it is necessary to isolate it and to observe its operation in a condition of closure. Only in conditions of artificial closure does the operation of a mechanism 'match' the event caused (see Collier 1994:45; Bhaskar 1997:229). Creating such conditions requires *work,* intervention in the ordinary course of things artificially to cause the realms of real, actual and empirical to match up. This is the work of experiment in natural science, and careful abstraction in thought in social science (Sayer 1987). The mistake of empiricism is to ignore the work that is required to create the conditions for constant conjunctions to occur: 'the most important feature of science neglected by the doctrine of empirical realism is that it is *work;* and hard work at that' (Bhaskar 1997:57). It thus ignores the fact that explanation of observed events demands reference to the real but not necessarily observable structures that combined to produce them. When analysing the open system of the world, empiricism implicitly assumes a ubiquitous condition of closure, in which causally relevant constant conjunctions occur, collapsing the domains of empirical, actual and real into one. Bhaskar's analysis of experimental activity leads to the unavoidable conclusion that patterns of events are ontologically distinct from causal mechanisms. That is, the real must be distinguished from the empirical.

As we have seen, orthodox social analysis consists of gathering data–atomistic facts about individuals, events and states of affairs–and identifying patterns of covariance among variables in the data set. The identification of regularly recurring patterns is seen as constituting an explanation: events–either antecedent or coexisting–and states of affairs are seen as the 'determinants' of a particular outcome. There is no notion of natural necessity or real, causally efficacious but non-empirical structures because of the implicit assumption that what exists is confined solely to that which appears, that is, to the empirical. In contrast, realism distinguishes between, on the one hand, structures and their causal powers, which are real and have the powers they do independently of particular instantiations, and which are the object of theory; and, on the other, events–actual outcomes–which are produced by the interaction of many different mechanisms in particular, contingent circumstances. A realist approach explains by reference to structures and generative mechanisms; it is concerned, as Bhaskar emphasises, with structures, not events.

Critical realism identifies social relations as a condition of any intentional action (Bhaskar 1998). People can only ever achieve any end they may wish to

pursue in the context of society, using material and social resources that are the product of social activity, current and past. It is therefore to structures of social relations that we must look in order to explain social phenomena, including poverty. Structures of social relations are analogous to the structures in nature by virtue of which entities have particular causal powers or tendencies. Structures of social relations and their causal powers and tendencies, however, are only relatively enduring, subject to (and the unintended outcome of) continual reproduction and occasional transformation by the practices of people. They are therefore historically specific and potentially transient; and historical outcomes are the result of different sets of structures conditioning outcomes in particular, contingent circumstances. Thus there are two related but distinct moments to a social explanation of historical processes: a theoretical knowledge of structures and their tendencies; and a historical analysis of the particular circumstances and combinations in which they exist (Bhaskar 1986:108; Manicas 1987; Sayer 1983: Part II).

Having outlined a realist approach to causality and social ontology–an approach predicated upon a critique of the flaws inherent within the empiricist assumptions pertaining to causality and explanation and which underlie the orthodoxy–we may now move on to explore the difference critical realism makes to substantive explanation. Thus, the second half of the chapter turns to an exploration of the difference critical realism makes to the task of explaining global poverty. This does not mean that critical realism has a definitive explanation of global poverty (or any substantive social phenomena for that matter). Rather, critical realism can act as an underlabourer for social scientific research. Bhaskar argues that

> It is important to be clear about what philosophical argument can achieve. Thus as a piece of philosophy we can say (given that science occurs) that some real things and generative mechanisms must exist (and act). But philosophical argument cannot establish which ones actually do; or, to put it the other way round, what the real mechanisms are. That is up to science to discover.
>
> (Bhaskar 1997:52)

Science–natural and social–provides knowledge by investigating reality, but such investigation needs to be guided by some philosophical precepts. If the facts spoke for themselves then science would be redundant and, as they do not, then science cannot be predicated upon empiricist methodology. Science requires realism as empiricism is untenable. So what does social inquiry grounded in realist principles look like? How does an account of substantive phenomena grounded in realist principles differ from an empiricist account?

Fortunately, it is not necessary to try to work this out by beginning from scratch, because various examples of social science developed according to realist methodological principles already exist. Most notable, perhaps, is the work of Karl Marx. One can argue that Marx was the first implicit critical realist.[5] However, he himself did not explicitly set out at the philosophical level the principles and

justification of his method. After 'settling accounts' with the idealists, his explicit treatment of his own methodology and philosophy of science is confined to relatively few brief statements and remarks scattered throughout his works (see Bhaskar 1991:163; 1989:133). But careful attention to his actual practice of inquiry–in *Capital* and the *Grundrisse* at least–reveals clearly its realist grounding. Thus it is with some justification that Bhaskar has hailed Marx as the 'comet' of the tradition of critical realism. He observes, commenting upon the relationship between Marxism and critical realism, that 'Marx's work at its best illustrates critical realism; and critical realism is the absent methodological fulcrum of Marx's work' (Bhaskar 1991:143).

Marx is not the only social theorist whose work accords with the principles of realism; and realist social science is not necessarily Marxist/historical materialist. But Marx's realist social science has discovered the properties and tendencies of the specific real social relations and generative mechanisms that produce global poverty. His theoretical elaboration of the necessary tendencies of the real, transfactually efficacious structures constitutive of the capitalist mode of production is arguably the existing social theory most adequate to the task of explaining global poverty

What difference does critical realism make?

The realist theory of social ontology shows that it is necessary to examine social relations in order to explain social phenomena (Bhaskar 1998). Society consists of sets of social relations through which social practices are carried out. What particular social relations should be examined in order to explain poverty? In order to answer this question it is necessary first to consider what is understood by the notion of poverty.

What–if anything–is wrong with the orthodox understanding of poverty? The World Bank report defined poverty as being 'concerned with the absolute standard of living of a part of society–the poor […] poverty […is] the inability to attain a minimal standard of living' (World Bank 1990:26). Thus, according to the orthodox interpretation, poverty can be conceived of as the non-fulfilment of human needs. This in itself is a satisfactory conception of poverty. The problem is that this orthodox notion rests on an atomistic social ontology, and an empiricism which *identifies empirically manifest wants with needs*. Because an empiricist approach reduces what exists to what is empirically knowable, it necessarily equates needs with wants as manifest in behaviour (consumption), and so behaviour directly reveals preferences. It is then argued that the market, in automatically allocating resources according to expressed preferences as revealed through demand in the market place, is the most efficient way of ensuring that maximum utility or welfare (as defined by people's free choice) is derived from available resources (Ramsay 1992).

The orthodoxy correctly identifies the poor in contemporary society (whether in Africa or in Britain) as those who fail to earn enough money to buy the things

necessary for a minimally reasonable existence. The orthodox solution is therefore to raise the incomes of the poor. In the case of Africa, the majority of the poor live in rural areas and farm for a living. Raising rural incomes therefore necessitates improving the productivity of the farmers' agriculture (for example, by increasing use of chemical inputs and improved seeds); and by encouraging (through incentives provided by a competitive market) a shift from subsistence farming to the production of 'cash-crops' (predominantly export crops), which fetch a higher price on the market. In this way, it is suggested by the orthodoxy, the farmers' agricultural output will become more 'profitable'. To put it very simply, the orthodoxy reaches the following conclusion: that people satisfy their needs by spending money to buy what they require on the market. The poor are unable to satisfy all their needs because they lack money; therefore they need to earn more money so that they will be able to satisfy their needs.

The orthodoxy is accurate at the descriptive level of surface appearances, but is blind to the real, non-empirical relations that generate empirical appearances (cf. Marx 1993 [1858]). A realist approach reveals the flaws in this orthodox conceptualisation of needs, and of how they are met. Human beings are complex, stratified natural beings. They have a range of causal powers or potentials by virtue of their structured nature. In common with all natural beings, various conditions are required for the realisation of their potentials. These conditions can be seen as the objects of human need (Collier 1979, 1989; Ramsay 1992). Natural beings meet their needs in ways determined by their structured nature–thus the biological nature of a plant determines the way in which it absorbs nutrients from the soil and converts sunlight into energy. Human beings have emergent powers rooted in the social strata, and meet their needs through production in society. Unlike the instinctual activities of animals, human beings self-consciously create the objects that satisfy their needs. This difference is at the root of human history and notions of development and progress, and the historicity of human needs. Human production is a self-conscious, intentional process involving planning, reflection and learning. It constitutes causal transformative interaction with material nature, and is an irreducibly social process that takes place through cooperation and the coordination of different activities (the division of labour). Knowledge about nature and techniques of production, as well as tools and other created means of production, are acquired and accumulated and passed on. The ways in which it is possible for humans to meet their needs are therefore not static and unchanging, as they are for animals; rather, they change and develop.

Poverty can be conceived of as a condition in which human needs are not adequately met and the realisation of various human powers is restricted or prevented. Any attempt to account for the existence of such a condition must start by identifying what sorts of things determine whether or not needs are met. The possibilities for satisfying human needs, the ways in which they are satisfied and the distribution of such possibilities in society, are determined by the social relations that govern the activities of producing the objects of human needs. In order to explain the historical phenomenon of widespread poverty–a

condition in which historically satisfiable human needs are systematically not met for a significant proportion of society, or are met in inadequate ways, in the midst of enormous wealth and material abundance and unsurpassed development of productive capabilities–it is therefore necessary to examine the social relations that determine production and the distribution of social powers in society. In the current era, these are the relations of the capitalist mode of production.

Human needs and the capitalist mode of production

All production consists of producing objects with particular concrete features and properties by virtue of which they satisfy distinct purposes. All products, therefore, have a *use-value*. In non-capitalist modes of production, production is organised according to, and motivated by, use-values, driven by the ultimate aim of reproducing society by means of the use-values produced. Marx's analysis of the commodity reveals one of the fundamental characteristics that distinguish capitalism from other historically existing modes of production. Under generalised commodity production the aim of production is exchange rather than use. Commodities are exchanged not on the basis of their particular, useful qualities in accordance with human needs, but on the basis of their *exchange-value*–the amount of abstract, socially necessary labour-time embodied within them. The aim of production is not the reproduction of society, but the reproduction and expansion of capital. The private property relations and competition constitutive of capitalist relations of production necessitate the continuous accumulation of capital, by means of increasing the productivity of labour such that more commodities (and hence more surplus value) are produced in a given period of time. In order for capital to return to its original money form, thus realising the surplus-value and enabling reinvestment in production, commodities have to be sold.

Under capitalism, production and distribution are governed by the law of value, and driven by the need for capital accumulation. Objects produced in society are exchanged on the basis of exchange-value. Money is the universal equivalent commodity, the universal representative of value that can be exchanged for any commodity. This means that an individual's ability to satisfy their needs, by acquiring certain objects, is determined by the amount of money they have. This in itself is determined by their position in society, because money is an expression of value, determined by the social relations of production. If they are a wage labourer, it will depend on the socially determined value of their labour power, and whether or not they are able to sell it; if they are a direct producer, it will depend on the socially determined value of the labour-time realised in their products, and whether or not they can sell them. The ability to do things, to meet needs, is determined by social relations that manifest themselves in, or take the form of, money. Thus the distribution of social power in society, which is determined by social relations, is manifest in *things* and the relations between things–money and commodities. As Marx puts it,

> The reciprocal and all-sided dependence of individuals who are indifferent to one another forms their social connection. This social bond is expressed in *exchange-value,* by means of which alone each individual's own activity or his product becomes an activity and a product for him; he must produce a general product–*exchange-value,* or, the latter isolated for itself and individualized, *money.* On the other side, the power which each individual exercises over the activity of others or over social wealth exists in him as the owner of *exchange-values,* of *money.* The individual carries his social power, as well as his bond with society, in his pocket. […] In exchange-value, the social connection between persons is transformed into a social relation between things; personal capacity into objective wealth
>
> (Marx 1993 [1858]:157).

Generalised commodity production and capital accumulation is predicated upon the division of society into a class of property owners–capitalists–and a class of workers who are propertyless and therefore dependent on selling their labour power in order to attain the means of survival. Capitalists own concentrated means of production capable of putting large numbers of individuals to work in such a way as to achieve high levels of productivity (by means of the division and organisation of labour, and highly developed technology). Productivity has to be such that the value produced by labour is more than the value contained within the products necessary for its own reproduction. The labourers are dependent on selling their labour power to the capitalists for a wage, with which they buy the objects required to meet their needs.

In advanced capitalist societies the majority of the population are dependent on selling their labour power in order to meet their needs. An understanding of the specific nature of capitalist social relations is therefore important (though not sufficient) when explaining conditions of inadequate need satisfaction in capitalist societies. But throughout much of Africa society does not consist of a class of wage labourers and a class of capitalists. The majority of the population are not an urban proletariat solely dependent on selling their labour power in order to meet their needs. Yet, it is argued here, conditions of poverty in the African countryside are an outcome of the historical expansion of capitalism and the development of the world market to the same extent, though in different ways, as they are in advanced capitalist societies. In order to substantiate this claim, a theoretical knowledge of the structural properties and necessary tendencies of the capitalist mode of production is important, but by itself is not sufficient. An explanation of actual social outcomes–whether in Britain or in Mozambique–necessitates an examination of the particular historical conditions and circumstances in which combinations of structures operate. As emphasised above, the elaboration of the structural properties and causal powers of relatively enduring social relations, and the analysis of concrete historical outcomes, are related but different moments of social inquiry. The next section attempts to consider briefly the particular historical outcomes of the inherently expansionary and global nature of the capitalist mode of production.

Human needs, global poverty and global production relations

It has been argued that poverty can be conceived of as a condition in which human needs are not satisfied; and that the objects created to satisfy human needs vary according to the way in which they are produced, which is determined by historically specific social relations of production. It is possible, therefore, to argue for a notion of poverty as inadequate need satisfaction defined according to the possibilities prevailing in the particular societal context under examination. So, for example, an understanding of the concrete form and experience of poverty in Britain in the year 2002 would be very different from that of poverty in Britain in 1738. The 'possibilities prevailing in society' are historically specific; and they are *social* possibilities. They are the product of society, available only by virtue of social labour, past and present. They do not and could not result from the actions of an isolated individual.

But if the notion of poverty is defined to some extent according to the possibilities prevailing in society at any one period, what is meant by 'society'? How are the boundaries to be drawn, for the purposes of assessing the prevailing possibilities of meeting needs? Is 'society' equal to the nation-state? If so, what can be said about differences between countries? The statistics in Table 12.1 provide a clear indication of the enormous difference in possibilities of need satisfaction that exist in Britain and Mozambique today.[6]

Is this pattern natural, just the way things are? Is it up to each individual nation-state to ensure the provision of resources in order to meet the needs of its population? This is the implication of the orthodoxy, which sees the economies of each nation-state as only externally, atomistically related to other economies. The suggestion is that differences between the capabilities within rich and poor nation-states can only be redressed through the generous donation of aid from rich to poor. Such a conclusion is only conceivable from a perspective blind to the existence of global production relations.

Is there a sense, however, in which existing possibilities of satisfying human needs are *global* possibilities; that 'society' extends throughout the world? It has been argued that meeting human needs is only possible in society, because the objects necessary to meet needs result from social labour, including that of previous generations. Does this argument only apply within the confines of a nation-state, or does it transcend the nation-state? This question can be illuminated by returning to examine further the realist understanding of society. The brief sketch of a realist ontology given above emphasised the social relations that constitute society. Different sets of relations exist, such as those between parent and child, teacher and student, employer and worker, landlord and tenant, and state and citizen, structurally linking different roles and practices. These sets of relations themselves are to greater or lesser extents overlapping and interconnected. Society consists in the whole network of different interconnected sets of social relations. Marx's description remains perhaps the most clear: 'society does not consist of individuals, but expresses the sum of the interrelations, the relations within which these individuals stand' (Marx 1993 [1858]:265). On this basis, the extent to which different sets of relations may be considered as

Table 12.1 Contrasting human development indicators for Mozambique and the United Kingdom

Human development indicator	*Mozambique*	*United Kingdom*
Life expectancy at birth (years)	43.8	77.3
Adult literacy rate (%)	42.3	99.0
Joint gross enrolment ratio (%)	25	105
GDP per capita (PPP$)	$782	$20,336
Population not expected to survive to age 40 (%)	41.9	9.6 (not expected to reach age 60)
Adult illiteracy rate (%)	57.7	21.8 ('functionally illiterate')
Population without access to safe water (%)	54%	*
Population without access to health services (%)	70%	*
Population without access to sanitation (%)	66%	*
Children under age 5 underweight (%)	26%	*
Maternal mortality rate per 100,000 births	1,100	7
Infant mortality rate per 1,000 births	129	6
Under age 5 mortality rate per 1,000 births	206	6

Source UNDP Human Development Report 2000. Note: * Data not given; presumably negligent

bounded is a *historical* question; and the particular social relations of interest depend on the question being considered. As Collier explains, referring to Marx's social ontology:

> It is not an 'atomism of relations'; the relations themselves can exist only in the context of other relations, forming an inter-connecting network [...] Such a network–'society'–is not a count-noun. It does not make sense to ask how many societies there are in the world–nor is there only one society. There is society–not societies or a society. Society is an open-textured network, which can be divided in various ways for the purposes of description and analysis, but these divisions are always more or less artificial.
>
> (Collier 1992:82)

As far as poverty and human needs are concerned, the social relations of most importance are those that determine how needs are actually met and how social power is distributed–relations of production. Production has been social production on a global scale, to a greater or lesser extent and in different ways but increasingly so, at least for the past three hundred years. That is, resources which are the result of social labour in one place provide the necessary condition for processes of production and development in another. Thus, as Marx and Engels observed:

> Direct slavery is as much the pivot of our industrialisation today as machinery, credit, etc. Without slavery, no cotton; without cotton no modern industry. Slavery has given value to the colonies; the colonies have created world trade; world trade is the necessary condition of large-scale machine industry.
>
> (Marx 1973 [1846]:523)

The resources that go together to provide possibilities for meeting human needs result from global social production. Ultimately, then, in the contemporary era it is the global sets of relations that determine how the social powers, made possible by virtue of produced resources, are distributed throughout the world; and so it is these relations–global production relations and the interstate structure through which capitalist accumulation is currently organised and regulated–that constitute the object of inquiry when considering global poverty.

Collier articulates the global nature of the social relations characteristic of the contemporary historical era, but which have not always existed. He asserts that today, unlike in previous eras, we live in a shared world:

> not in the trivial sense that we all live on the third planet from the sun. In 1600, the peoples of, say, England and India had no obligations to each other beyond abstention from piracy, and hospitality to the occasional visitor. (And, I am told, the Indian people's standard of living was a little higher than that of the English). Today, however, we have become one world in two ways: economically, in that we are all massively dependent on goods produced all over the world; and ecologically, in that we are *all* threatened by the ecological irresponsibility of *all*. The whole planet has become a shared world, even for those who never leave their village. Thus, a tie which is both real and universal has arrived; not yet in the form of a real collectivity embracing humankind, but of real relations of mutual dependence through the sharing of the world.
>
> (Collier 1992:87)

This has not always been the case. The era of 'world history' results from the specific nature of the capitalist mode of production, its inherently expansionary character and its tendency to bring about, necessarily, the continual revolution of productive forces and the augmentation of productive powers, a development

that structurally connects geographically disparate peoples through globally organised production. As Marx and Engels explain:

> The further the separate spheres, which act on one another, extend in the course of this development and the more the original isolation of the separate nationalities is destroyed by the advanced mode of production, by intercourse and by the natural division of labour between various nations arising as a result, the more history becomes world history. Thus, for instance, if in England a machine is invented which deprives countless workers of bread in India and China, and overturns the whole form of existence of these empires, this invention becomes a world-historical fact […] From this it follows that this transformation of history into world history is […] a quite material, empirically verifiable act, an act the proof of which every individual furnishes as he comes and goes, eats, drinks and clothes himself.
>
> (Marx and Engels 1998 [1845]:58–9)

Their account illustrates the characteristically and necessarily *uneven* outcomes that result from the historical development and expansion of capitalism. This unevenness is not accidental, as implied by the orthodoxy which sees events as externally related in time and space. Realism distinguishes between real structures, with given structural tendencies, and the actual combinations of structures and circumstances that make up the 'concrete conjuncture'. Accordingly, the actual social forms and processes manifest in different contexts will be very different, although determined by the operation of broadly similar generative mechanisms or sets of mechanisms. The laws of the capitalist mode of production are real and invariant, determined by its structural tendencies (although the structures themselves are only relatively enduring and essentially transient). However, the historical processes of change in different periods and different places that result from the operation of those structural tendencies in conjunction with other structures and in the context of particular circumstances will be very different in form and content, although they may share some essential properties. As Jeffrey Isaac explains:

> Capitalism […] is a historically specific social structure. But to speak of capitalism is not to speak of its instantiation in specific locales. It is to refer to its properties as a real structure that always exists in complex relation to other structures in the concrete world, and that we can come to know through theoretical abstraction.
>
> (Isaac 1987:62)

Hence it is not the case that the so-called developing countries of the Third World will follow the same path to industrial capitalism as was trodden by Europe and America; though it is the case that specific processes such as commodification will be identifiable as essentially similar, though different in form, to processes that occurred in other places and/or at other times.

The inherently and necessarily expansionary nature of capitalism has led both to its increasing penetration into ever more spheres of life, which previously remained outside the sphere of market relations, and to increasing geographical expansion throughout the world. Already-existing local modes of production and social formations around the world have been, and continue to be, to greater and lesser degrees, transformed by the penetration of capitalist relations and the development of commodity production. In different ways and different circumstances, all around the world, local modes of production organised on the basis of production for *use,* with the reproduction of society as the goal, have been transformed into the production of commodities, producing for exchange, with production subordinated to the requirements of capital accumulation. The particular ways in which this has occurred vary according to context in space and time, and are determined by the nature of local conditions and social and political relations, as well as the historical phases of capitalist development as a whole. It is these relations and conditions that must be examined in order to explain, for example, the predominantly rural structure of societies in Africa today and the 'rurality' of poverty, which the orthodoxy can describe but cannot explain. The historical tendency to move towards the transformation of production relations and commodification has not always led to industrial capitalism and generalised commodity production based on wage labour. In much of the Third World there is no mass urban industrial proletariat; "much of the population in many third world societies have not been divorced entirely from the land and basic means of production".

This does not mean, however, that such societies consist partly of autonomous pre-capitalist havens, untouched by capitalism. The conditions of the lives of peasants in Africa today are of course very different from those of the European working class, for example. But they are also very different from conditions prevailing in Africa five hundred years ago, and even two hundred years ago. Contemporary social conditions and relations in the African country-side and in industrial urban areas in Western Europe, though very different, must both be seen as products of the historical development of capitalism.[7] As Derek Sayer argues:

> Capitalism embraces far more than what is normally taken to be 'modernity' […] Wage labour may well be the basis upon which commodity production can alone be generalised, but given such a generalisation it is not the sole source of profits to be made from buying and selling commodities. On the contrary, the global dominance of the capitalist market breathes new life into (transforms) a variety of other modes of production, which adapt themselves to and become integral elements of the 'modern' world. The latter is thus a world whose modernity many of its inhabitants, strategic as they might be to the circuits of capital, have yet to experience. Plain slavery, serfdom, indentured labour, convict labour, sharecropping, and cash-crop peasant production have all at one time or another been component parts of the international capitalist order.
>
> (Sayer 1991:48)

A realist approach thus reveals the profoundly historical nature of global poverty. The orthodoxy, focusing on events rather than structures, sees history as an inert backdrop to the present, a chronological past in the linear sequence of atomistic, externally connected events whose juxtaposition, for it at least, make up 'history'. There is no notion of historical necessity, asymmetry or irreversibility. The frequent references to 'catching up' (or, in the case of Africa, getting 'left behind') typical of orthodox thinking about development reveal a complete lack of understanding of the structural determinants and interconnections of world history. For the orthodoxy, if something happened in one place and time, then it can happen in another place and time.

A realist approach, in contrast, distinguishes between, on the one hand, relatively enduring structures and, on the other, their combinations and interactions in particular circumstances that produce historical outcomes. The outcome of the orthodoxy's *ahistorical* analysis is that historically specific and potentially transient social forms become naturalised and therefore are seen to be eternal. The flawed empiricist assumptions underlying the orthodoxy render it capable of description but not explanation.

The importance of this is not simply that the orthodoxy is wrong. It is not the case that global poverty has not yet been eliminated simply because of the weaknesses in existing analyses. The realist theory of social ontology and epistemology shows that ideas matter because in informing practice ideas are causally efficacious, making a real difference to social outcomes. The outcome usually unintended and unacknowledged–of social practices is the reproduction of specific sets of social relations (Bhaskar 1998). The orthodoxy prevents identification of the social relations that systematically generate the outcome of poverty. It takes as given historically specific features of existing society, portraying them as natural and eternal. Practice informed by such an understanding therefore does not explicitly challenge or see the need to transform existing social relations–indeed, it denies the existence of such relations.

The outcome is to secure the reproduction of these social structures: analysis informed by empiricism is inherently conservative. As such, the orthodoxy is ideological: its errors 'are not just mistakes, but ones which function in the interest of a particular social system' (Collier 1994:104). It consists of a set of false ideas about society, which necessarily arise within and serve to reproduce the structure of that society. A full examination of the ideological status of the orthodoxy would reveal how the atomistic assumptions at its core arise spontaneously from the appearance and experience of capitalist society. This is a task in itself that lies beyond the scope of this chapter. However, it is important to emphasise that, while orthodox ideas about poverty and other social phenomena that serve to secure the reproduction of existing social relations may be to some extent intentionally propagated for that reason, this is not sufficient to account for their hegemonic status and efficacy. This is not to dismiss the fact that the institutions of the powerful consciously promote certain ideas and quite consciously attempt to quash others. Recognition and examination of the ways such ideas are promoted is certainly important.

However, the existence and nature of the orthodoxy cannot be accounted for solely because of its function in serving the interests of the powerful. The success of such intentionally promoted ideologies relies upon, and is parasitic upon, already existing 'common-sense' ideologies. People are not dupes. Ideas, and more broadly consciousness, are internally related to an individual's practical experience of the world. This means that the notion of 'false consciousness'—of people ordinarily being mistaken about the things they see—is misleading. Ideas will—and indeed must—have some measure of practical adequacy, even if they do not provide a fully adequate explanatory account of the phenomena in question. They must be adequate to the extent that they enable successful intentional action in the world. It is not necessary to understand why something works in the way that it does in order to interact successfully with it—it is not necessary, for example, to know how an internal combustion engine works in order to drive a car. This means that there must be some phenomenal grounding to common-sense ideologies such as atomism. An explanatory critique of the orthodoxy would therefore necessitate identifying the particular characteristics of contemporary society that give rise to such common-sense understandings (Collier 1989:56, Sayer 1983:8).

Conclusion

An examination of the orthodoxy shows it to be underpinned by an atomistic social ontology This is because empiricism is blind to social structures and sees only individuals. The result is ahistorical: the status quo of a global capitalist market economy is taken entirely as given, as a natural state of affairs. Poverty is seen to be a problem to be tackled by private charity. The solutions offered represent at most the amelioration of affairs, or symptom suppression. This empiricist approach sticks to surface appearances and denies the existence of real but non-empirical structures and causal mechanisms. It is ideological and ultimately amounts to a refinement of common-sense understanding based on everyday experience of the world. In contrast, realism identifies the real but non-empirical structures of social relations that generate the phenomena of experience as the necessary focus of an explanation of social phenomena. This chapter has sketched the difference critical realism makes to explaining global poverty.

The satisfaction of human needs demands material resources in order to enable people to develop their powers and capacities; furthermore, it demands social control over production, that is, socially organised and controlled production guided and determined by use values. Production for exchange, characterised as it is by private property relations in a competitive world market and hugely augmented productive powers mainly (increasingly) under control of large, concentrated transnational capital, is fundamentally contradictory to this end. A realist analysis, which replaces the atomism of the orthodoxy with a focus on the social relations of global capitalism, therefore leads to the conclusion that problems of poverty and inequality demand a transformation in the social relations through which production is organised and which determine the distribution of powers in society As Andrew Collier has argued, scientific analysis of capitalism reveals the

'case for socialism as *increasingly* relevant and indeed urgent in the modern world' (Collier 1990: x). The realist conclusion contradicts the overtly voluntaristic appeals to generosity typical of the orthodoxy, which issue directly from empiricism and social atomism. While appealing to popular concern about the existence of extreme inequality and widespread poverty, it prevents comprehension of the cause of this phenomenon, and in so doing serves to secure the reproduction of the social structures causally responsible.

Notes

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2 Clare Short, in the 1997 Government White Paper on development and poverty, emphasised that the goal was poverty *elimination*.

3 Some organisations campaigning about issues such as poverty do provide incisive critical analyses. This chapter focuses on the mainstream approach.

4 For a detailed examination see Williams (1994: Chapter 4).

5 There are of course various interpretations of Marx's work, many of which are themselves inconsistent with realist principles, leading to historicist, actualist or idealist understandings of historical materialism. In this respect, critical realism 'makes a difference' to historical materialism too. That is, it enables an explicit articulation and defence of Marx's method, grounded in a transcendental inquiry into the conditions of possibility of the given practice of scientific experiment (see in particular Collier 1989, 1979). This reveals clearly the ways in which Marx's method is superior both to the methods of the classical and vulgar economists of his time and to those of subsequent mainstream social science, all of which are grounded in empiricism.

6 The statistics in this table serve only to emphasise the different conditions and possibilities that exist in different parts of the world. They are averages or percentages for two nation-states, and as such can be misleading because they give no indication of inequality within the two societies, nor of the different quality of poverty. There is considerable wealth in Mozambique, although the majority of the population are very poor. Furthermore, such figures should not be taken to suggest that there is little poverty in the UK (on this subject see, for example, Davies 1998).

7 Much European writing on modernity and postmodernity appears to exhibit an almost total ignorance of the situation of many millions of people now living in the modern/postmodern globalising world. To this extent, such analyses are inexcusably Eurocentric. Derek Sayer makes this point eloquently:

> Typologies and theories grounded in the presumed radical distinctiveness of modernity continue to be the stock-in-trade of sociological thought. A century later Anthony Giddens, ardent critic of nineteenth-century evolutionism though he is, remains in no doubt at all that 'the world in which we live today certainly differs more from that in which human beings have lived for the vast bulk of their history than whatever differences have separated human societies at any previous period' […] a stupendous piece of modernist hubris *(and one which begs the obvious question of who are the 'we' of and for who he speaks)*. But where Marx is singular is in his insistence that what makes modernity modern is, first and foremost, capitalism itself.
>
> (Sayer 1991:12; emphasis added)

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