

## **RECONSTRUCTING GLOBAL INTERCONNECTEDNESS: THE COMPLEMENTARY ROLES OF PHILOSOPHY AND SOCIAL SCIENCES**

- A conversation with Roy Bhaskar and Heikki Patomäki

Edited by Matti Jutila<sup>1</sup>

### **Introduction: a very brief history of Critical Realism**

One way to view the formation of contemporary critical realism is to see it as a refinement and deepening of, and in crucial respects also a departure from, the work of Rom Harré. In the 1970s, he developed many of the notions which became central to scientific realism (Harré 1961, 1970; Harré and Madden 1975; Harré and Secord 1976). Mary Hesse (1966), Mario Bunge (1959, 1963), Hilary Putnam (1975) and Stephen Toulmin (1953) were other important names involved in forging this new realist strand of ideas about science. Roy Bhaskar has been developing his approach to scientific realism since mid 1970s. Harré's work was a considerable influence on Bhaskar, whom Harré also supervised from 1970-74 (see Collier 1994 for their mutual influence and relationship). Although their paths, subsequently, have amicably diverged, Bhaskar's *Realist Theory of Science* (1975) can also be seen, in part, as a systematic articulation and further development of Harré's scientific realism (for a critical conversation between them related to the theme of global discourse, see Bhaskar and Harré 2002)..

Bhaskar was also very influenced by "anti-monistic" philosophers and sociologists of science, such as Karl Popper, Thomas Kuhn, Imre Lakatos and Paul Feyerabend, who had signaled the corrigibility, historicity and relativity of knowledge. He also interpreted realist science in Marxian terms of production, adding a critical analysis of the connections between standard Western views of science, and the associated atomist or individualist sociology of action (not unlike the Frankfurt School).

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<sup>1</sup> This conversation took place in Helsinki (Radison SAS Plaza Hotel), 12.11.2005. The main editing of the text was done by Jutila, but Bhaskar and Patomäki have edited their parts of the conversation. The introduction was written collectively by all three. We have used the Harvard-style of references only in the introductory part in order to emphasise the oral origin of the conversation itself.

After these and subsequent developments, the term “critical realism” (CR) was coined in the late 1980s (see Bhaskar 1989).

In short, the content of CR is understood with the help of three philosophical theses: *ontological realism*, *epistemological relativism* and *judgmental rationalism*. Ontological realism means that the world is not only real but it must also be differentiated, structured, layered and possess causal powers. This forms the basis for our knowledge of the different aspects of the world, but this knowledge is always socially produced, contextual and fallible (epistemological relativism). This interpretative pluralism does not mean that all knowledge claims are equally valid. According to judgmental rationalism, we can always compare various interpretations, explanations and models to make well-grounded and plausible judgements about their truth.

Over the past few decades CR has reached an established position among theorists of social science, even though it is not as popular in mainstream philosophy departments. This is evident on the basis of a quick look at the affiliations of the contributors of a collection of essential CR readings (Archer et.al. 1998). In World Politics, Heikki Patomäki, Colin Wight especially, and to an extent Alexander Wendt have brought the ideas of CR into the meta-theoretical discussions of their discipline. Patomäki has developed a CR approach to World Politics in his 1992 PhD-thesis, and in many articles following, as well as in the book *After International Relations* (Patomäki 2002). CR has also become increasingly popular among doctoral students in various British and Finnish departments of political science and International Relations (IR), perhaps especially in Helsinki where Patomäki has been a professor of IR since 2003.<sup>2</sup>

### **Critical Realism as a philosophy and an approach to World Politics**

MJ: Even though Critical Realism (CR) has reached an established position among traditions of philosophy over the past few decades, it still remains somewhat unknown to

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<sup>2</sup> For attempts to develop a critical realist approach to Peace Research and World Politics see Wendt 1987; Patomäki 1996, 2001, 2002a; Patomäki and Wight 2000; and Wight 2006. As well, Wendt 1999 is based on a form of scientific realism, although Wendt’s project of rearticulating conventional IR theory in social constructivist terms is alien to CR at least in the sense (i) of taking such categorical distinctions as inside and outside or politics and economy for granted, and (ii) of modelling IR theory on the positivist theory of Kenneth Waltz (1979) and demarcating its area roughly in the same way.

many students of Peace Research and World Politics. How would you briefly describe Critical Realism and its relation to other schools of thought?

RB: One way of looking at CR – at least from the point of view of my involvement – is to see it as going through succession of topics starting from the philosophy of science<sup>3</sup> moving through the philosophy of social science<sup>4</sup> into value theory<sup>5</sup> then onto dialectic<sup>6</sup>. But I think it would be true to say that critical realism is rooted in an understanding of science which sees science as aiming to uncover ever deeper structures which in the natural world at least for the most part exist independently of human beings. This marks the break with both, on the one hand, positivism and, on the other, post-modernism and post-structuralism. The emphasis on structure might be reminiscent of Kantianism, but then this is structure which is in the world - not just imposed by human mind or scientific community - and knowledge of which can be emancipatory.

HP: Firstly, I think of CR as a way of overcoming the methodological debate between positivism and post-positivism that, to me, seems to repeat the same arguments all over again without any real progress. It is also a way of overcoming the substantial international problematique, which is ultimately founded on the same epistemological and ontological foundations. Following a critical genealogy of the international problematique we can actually attempt to refashion an ontological and epistemological ground from which we can also explain, understand and criticize those practices that are in part being constituted by those forms of knowledge that CR is attempting to overcome. Finally, to me CR also implies a move from the traditional international problematique to something that I would like to call world politics or political economy.

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<sup>3</sup> Bhaskar 1978 [1975].

<sup>4</sup> Bhaskar 1979.

<sup>5</sup> Bhaskar 1986.

<sup>6</sup> Bhaskar 1993, 1994. Bhaskar's dialectical works have not been adopted as unequivocally by critical realists as the earlier texts. One reason may be that they are complex and difficult books to read. However, Hostettler and Norrie 2003 argue – although they endorse the basic project of dialectical critical realism – that Bhaskar's attempt to develop a realist morality in the *Dialectic* is ultimately unsuccessful (Hostettler and Norrie advocate "anti-foundationalism"). On the other hand, Norrie 2004 maintains that dialectical critical realism is an improvement upon Adorno's negative dialectics. Morgan 2004 in turn develops a strategy of critically assessing the basic claims of the *Dialectic*. The discussion continues.

RB: Much analytical philosophy is not what, following Hegel, I would call "serious"; it is out of line with and irrelevant to our social practices and the problems they generate. This is connected to the "stuckness" of much philosophical and social thought, the fact that the terms of the problematics within which they conceptualize the world do not permit them to resolve or break free of the aporia they generate. I think it's very important to stress the stasis – that is the stagnant quality – of a lot of philosophical and social thought. I'm always amazed when I go back into analytical philosophy to see that exactly the same puzzles, exactly the same problems, are the subject of attention as when I was a student. These are also more or less the same problems that Russell, Moore and Wittgenstein were dealing with, and they are the same problems that Hume and Kant were dealing with. There has been no or little progress since then. An analytical philosopher might accept this, contending that this is something inherent in the nature of philosophy. But it isn't. There are periods in the history of philosophy when rapid progress has been made. Moreover, the topics of which philosophy treats – the nature of knowledge, of being, of human beings in society – are tremendously important for the practice of the angst-ridden and contested social sciences today. So if you wanted to say that critical realist philosophy was doing something different from let's say contemporary analytical philosophy, it's also doing something which is both very much in line with the historic vocation of philosophy and desperately needed by at least the contemporary social sciences. It is in this sense that I think a lot of academic philosophy is no longer "serious". For, on the one hand, it remains stuck in the thought and practice and problems of the past, which it is neither conscious of nor can resolve, and, on the other hand, it is everywhere refuted by its daily practice. To be serious, is to make one's theory consistent with one's practice, and if it is not, to modify one or other or both, so that we can increase the rationality of our practices and the reflexivity of our thought alike.

HP: The same goes for, say, normative theory in IR which is an extension of the traditional normative problematic of analytical philosophy. Here we can often see a simple return to Kant or Hume. In the 18<sup>th</sup> century theorists basically did normative political theory, as well as natural law theorizing. I think many contemporary, normative theorists are indeed reproducing the late 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> century problematic. This is only

one instance of a more general phenomenon of this kind of a repetitive, cognitive structure that we encounter in our everyday practices in the academic field of International Relations, and also in the practical field of multilateral diplomacy. These are particularly important fields also for critical realism because some of the conditions for the emergence of CR actually involve world politics and political economy. One of the geo-historical conditions for the emergence of CR you mentioned in the second section of, *Philosophy and the Idea of Freedom*, is globalization and all these global problems that we are encountering at the moment, including the end of the boom of the Bretton Woods era.<sup>7</sup> Other related problems include for example global, ecological problems as well as the problem of war in the context of the new powers to destroy, particularly nuclear weapons, but also other weapons of mass destruction. We also have an increasingly profound understanding about the smallness of this planet in which a large part of its deeply interconnected humanity continues to live in extreme poverty. We are seeing this constellation also in terms of a potential ethico-political clash – which certainly is a major problem for any attempt to govern the world “rationally”. In order to govern global, geo-historical processes reasonably we also need an emancipatory understanding of how to transform contemporary power relations into something much more empowering, democratic, and also just.<sup>8</sup>

### **Interconnectedness**

RB: Yes absolutely. I think one of the features of the world situation today is that we are all inextricably interconnected and it’s not possible for any group of people to opt out. I mean they can opt out of action but they won’t be able to opt out of the consequences of their inactions and actions. For example, we have an ecological crisis which affects everyone whatever they do, so that we’re bound up as one world and one people today.

HP: One of the points of CR is, of course, the deepening of the interconnectedness of humanity, but there is also a more ontological level of deepening the connectedness. In

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<sup>7</sup> About these conditions, see Bhaskar 1991, 139-141.

this regard, I mean CR is quite close to some forms of post-structuralism, take Jacques Derrida's thinking for example; plus, it is not far from certain strands of Buddhism either.<sup>9</sup> All humanity is deeply interconnected at the level of the mode of being, the way our civilizations and cultures have evolved in interaction. We all have common African ancestors and all Afro-Eurasian cultures have always closely interacted – only the American continent was cut off for a short while. That is one part of it. Also, at a very deep level there is a certain core humanity where, whatever we do, we are in a particular way constituted beings, and whatever we do, we can always communicate and generate new beings, both biologically and socially, by means of our interactions. Humanity is in that sense deeply interconnected, but it is not necessarily one.

RB: No, it's not necessarily united, not at all. In a way the divisions become more apparent, but we can all see or experience them. Thus, for example after the London bombings whole categories of people in the UK were suddenly stigmatized as being at the very least potential terrorists, as epistemologically and socially "other". This is crazy. First the Asian community was identified and then when people understood that Muslims were not just Pakistanis, Bangladeshis, Iraqis and other Asians, but that they included Africans and indeed Europeans, English people, Londoners etc., then it was anyone with any degree of colour who was suspect. This was vividly exemplified by the terrible case of the shooting by the police, in the wake of the bombings, of the Brazilian Jean Charles de Menezes. The whole unfolding of that event was very extraordinary because, I remember the interviews of the people who were sitting in the train when the guy was killed they had never seen anything like it. They were really, completely broken. They had never dreamed in their wildest dreams that they would see uniformed policemen holding down someone and shooting him. I mean holding him down to shoot him! And actually I happened to be in England at the time and within the first day there were three or four different stories put out by the authorities: none true. And it was very gripping

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<sup>8</sup> For a metatheoretical and theoretical groundwork for and discussion on these key concepts, see Held & Patomäki 2006; Patomäki 2006.

<sup>9</sup> See Patomäki 2002b for a discussion on the philosophical underpinnings of a would-be global dialogue. Have those Western philosophers – Nietzsche, Derrida, Galtung and Bhaskar – who have turned to the East in search for inspiration and ideas, actually found any useful conceptual resources? Perhaps new global philosophies are emerging, anticipating a global 'democracy-to-come'?

and important thing for people in England to follow and they did follow it and there would have been a lot of understanding or partial understanding of levels and aspects of reality which most people would not have ordinarily thought about.

### **Media appearances of human and ‘natural’ disasters**

HP: Yes, most people feel this interconnectedness through media appearances. Media appearances are more and more global, whether you are in India or the US or Finland it does not make a difference. Basically we very often see the same pictures and the same videos from the same angle by the same media corporations.

RB: It’s very important of course to have an understanding and a critique of the media and the way the media present things. But even then you know it’s kind of like whatever the media do, that some of reality is going to get through. I give you an example: the case of the earthquake in northern Pakistan. This is widely presented as a natural disaster in which human beings are completely non-culpable and more or less caused by God. But actually it’s not. Because you have one building in Islamabad that collapses, and another building next to it that doesn’t. The building that doesn’t collapse is the building which was built according to proper building instructions and regulations, bearing in mind the possibility of an earthquake. The building which collapses is the building which isn’t. I remember on the day after this event a television commentator putting this point to a Pakistani scientist, asking in effect what can be done about such "natural disasters". The scientist said: “earthquakes don’t cause deaths, bad housing does”. The importance of this point can be shown by comparing two earthquakes in San Francisco of the same approximate strength. The one in 1906 which kills 100 000 people and one in early 1990’s which kills 17. Similarly of course as we know with the Asian tsunami. Why did the Thai government not tell the people on the spot that a tsunami was coming? I mean they could have even told the tourists if they didn’t feel so concerned the loss of Thai life – I’m saying this with a heavy irony. They were scared that it would frighten off tourists. But what could be worse for the Thai economy than the way in which the tourists must be scared of now. And then there was the simple question of education: no-one, certainly not

the westerners, but also most of the indigenous people, had been given any sort of understanding of what a tsunami was, so that when the sea receded, as the wave approached, most of the people just stood where they were and watched. What you have to do in a tsunami is to understand that a huge wave is going to come and get ASAP to the highest possible ground. But in fact they all stood rooted. There had been no education.

HP: If you want to give a causally explanatory account of the death toll any particular natural disaster, you actually have to give a good account of those causally efficacious social structures that are also at play.

RB: Yes, if you wanted to do that kind of an analysis, the social structures count for far more deaths than the natural events in themselves. The natural events provide only one of the conditions for such a disaster, which is very largely man-made.

HP: This is the part of the reality that barely ever comes up in the global media, so these appearances are very misleading because they hardly ever go into the deeper layers of reality and that is very much part of the problem. For example, there has been a period of decline in the number of people being killed in wars since the end of the cold war.<sup>10</sup> Very few people, first of all, know this because of the appearance that militarized security is an increasing problem, and that there are all kinds of enemies – terrorists in particular. Almost everything has been securitized. That is a large part of the more regressive part of the neo-liberal agenda. It becomes more authoritarian when it becomes more difficult to actually legitimize its particular agenda and role in the world.<sup>11</sup> Of course, that is only one part of the story. The other is, even if somebody noticed that there is a decline in the number of deaths, there is rarely ever an attempt to explain why that is the case. Why has this happened following the end of the cold war, and what other counter-tendencies might exist? In a number of regions in the global South, local conflicts were either being created

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<sup>10</sup> See Harbom and Wallensteen 2005; Human Security Centre 2005.

<sup>11</sup> For an excellent, recent discussion on the reasons why, as it seems, the only way for the neoliberal utopian vision can be sustained is by means of force, violence and authoritarianism involving widespread securitization, see Harvey 2005, 28, 36-37, 79-86.

or sustained by the super powers and were very related to the Cold War. So the cold war was not only cold. It was cold in the North and it was constantly very close to being actualized, but it was very hot in the global South. Both sides were actually arming and giving money and many other things to the parties involved. That made conflicts much more expensive both in terms of money and destruction of material, social structures, and human beings. Now, of course, because of the end of the cold war and the collapse of the Soviet Union, that particular causally generative structure has disappeared; it was absented. But on the other hand, there are all kinds of counter tendencies. Many of those are related to the global political economy. For instance, we know from many studies that if we want to explain disasters, such as, genocide, civil wars, conflicts and the like, they are very often transnational even if they appear local; there are many transnational actors involved. Moreover, they are usually preceded first by the perception of huge inequalities in the relevant societies, localities, or contexts, and second, by an economic decline.<sup>12</sup> Both are also being caused by neo-liberal global governance at the moment. So what we also have is a counter tendency at play.

According to media appearances, security is an increasing problem, but does not specify in any way what its sources are, or how important the risks are in comparison to whatever, and so on. Even if somebody notices that there has actually been a decline in the number of deaths in wars and other related forms of collective violence, they can hardly ever explain it. Even if they can explain it, they hardly ever notice that there are actually counter tendencies at play. So these media appearances are seriously misleading. Even though human interconnectedness is being played out in the global media, at the same time it is also a dangerous force because the appearances are so misleading. Many people are too easily led to conclusions – in terms of concrete ethico-political responses as well – that are counterproductive in relation to the realization of any emancipatory forms of this human interconnectedness.

## **Global democratization**

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<sup>12</sup> See Nafziger and Auvinen 2003.

RB: To make another point about appearances you probably remember the Indian election last year. It's a continual theme that the West wants democracy throughout the world, irrespective of say things like American support for Pakistan and other patently undemocratic regimes. India's was the world's largest democracy and sure enough it was a kind of beautiful test case. The election was won by the Congress Party led by Sonja Gandhi who wanted to see a redirection of resources back to the public sector, which has collapsed in India today, and also a little bit away from information technology back to things like the villages and agriculture, which are in crisis. OK, Sonja Gandhi won, terrific. What happens? Next day there is a collapse on the Mumbai stock exchange. The day after Sonja Gandhi says she will not be the Prime Minister and instead the congress candidate for next prime minister is Manmohan Singh who is a safe neo-liberal economic minister – well know to the international community and to the business community. And so what happens: Before the elections we had neo-liberalism, certain kind of trajectory for the Indian future, after the election we have the same. So actually the whole input of democracy disappears.

HP: I think your story indicates reification. What we find in the media is reification of social realities. First of all, democracy is being reified in terms of a particular model of certain liberal democratic institutions. Regular multiparty elections are by definition democracy. It does not actually matter what the reality of political choice is, or what are the real power structures and relations. From a CR point of view, democracy means that the real power relations are organized in such a way that it is possible for all the equal actors, understood first and foremost as equal citizens, to have a say in the final outcome of political will-formation. There are numerous possibilities for organizing relations of power and shared institutions democratically, not just one formalistic model that, all too often, is being imposed by external forces who are in return being reified, for instance, in the global media. Democracy has to do with real choices.

RB: That's right and you know really we have to have more choice. We have to have the choice restored to us. I've been doing some work in the Nordic area, particularly in

Sweden and Norway the last couple of years. In this area there's a real chance that a good fight can be waged to rescue something of the welfare state; in particular, some idea that a society has a right to choose and that it can actually choose what social provisions to make. That's all part of the project of emancipation which is a very important theme of CR because only if you have an understanding of the real and hidden structures, which actually determine and predetermine the lives of ordinary people, in very differential ways, can you begin to remove obstacles to greater freedom and human rationality.

HP: It is one of my key points in, *After International Relations* that – in the world we are living today – emancipatory projects are necessarily tied together and there must be some kind of a global understanding behind them. Even when we are acting in a very local way, in a particular local context we have to be able to see the connections – both internal and external– to the wider realities and then we will come to realize that our particular project, and its success, is connected to the success of other related projects elsewhere in the world. I think this is – even if not always articulated at a theoretical level – the understanding behind global civil society, or at least the more political part of the global civil society, in particular the World Social Forum. Civil society organizations and movements want to create a forum of dialogue within which they can exchange experiences, and also start thinking about how to organize politics together. Many forms of political organization and political projects need to be tied to democracy globally. We also need global democracy as a key component and part of any emancipatory project, anywhere.<sup>13</sup> Of course it is not only about democracy, I mean we have other structural conditions and impediments to tackle as well.

### **Social scientists and emancipation**

MJ: How do you see the task of social scientists in this emancipatory project? Is it just the study of the underlying structures and publishing them as widely as possible or do you see some other role for scientists as well?

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<sup>13</sup> For a detailed strategy of global democratization, see Patomäki and Teivainen 2004.

RB: I think that the main job of scientists is to understand the world. If scientists did just that it would be fantastic. If social scientists just tried to understand the social world you couldn't really ask any more of them. With that understanding we ordinary citizens and scientists in their capacity as ordinary citizens can use the knowledge to begin to transform those social structures. I'm not really advocating a different vocation for scientists. I would say that an emancipatory impulse stems necessarily in some cases from the everyday routine scientific job of accurately describing and adequately explaining social reality. When you see a bit of social reality which is false and efficacious and subverting human intentionality, then I think necessarily in describing this, you are adopting a critical stance to it. For in effect you will be saying to the agents whose intentionality is thwarted, that if they want to avoid this, they must change something, do something else. Then, when you're looking at a set of beliefs informing practices which is false and which you can explain, in showing this, without really trying to do anything else, you will be pointing people towards what they must do, which is to get rid of the structures which are crippling them. But of course falsity is not the only social ill. There are many others, such as poverty, unemployment, homelessness, etc. In pursuing the programme of explanatory critique – necessarily explanatory, contingently critical – the social scientist will inevitably in pursuing his or her explanatory charter be making truth and other judgments as part of his or her scientific remit and that is bound to be evaluative. That is bound to be political with a lower “p”. And then as a citizen, balancing these scientifically generated imperatives with all their other values, they may of course come to take decisions which will be political with a big “P”.

HP: I am slightly ambivalent about the proper role and place of human and social sciences. I am not sure if the ambivalence is bad in any sense of the term, but ambivalence there is nonetheless. On the one hand I am very much in favour of the autonomy of science and social sciences because we have to preserve a space where we, as academics, have time to freely think about what is the truth here. The point is to be able to explain things independent of any external influences, power relations and so on. We need this communicative space where we can actually explore and investigate things, and compose innovative new explanations. This is absolutely vital for any science

anywhere. On the other hand we are engaged in practices where truth, on one side, is an ethical virtue for all the scientists including social scientists, but on the other it is a moral obligation that we cannot avoid. In that sense, I think that the Habermasian theory of communicative action is correct even though his understanding of the universality of it is somewhat misleading; I think it is correct in the sense that we are always normatively committed to truth in every speech act we make. Furthermore, truth has implications on our political practices because if we can explain something better then – as you Roy have developed this idea – we have an explanation of those false beliefs and thus a moral obligation to transform those practices and structures emerges. This points to the fact that the true meaning of social sciences, at the end of the day, is in its impact on the world. In that sense the autonomy of science and social sciences is necessary for its success (in any sense of the term), but at the same time there is an ethical notion or virtue that points to a more, say, participatory notion of social sciences and also a moral obligation to the same effect. So we have to be in the world (outside the academia), act in the world, and make transformations in the world because that is the whole point of social sciences.

I would like to make another point in this context. One of the problems of traditional social sciences is not only that it frequently retreats to its academic ivory towers, but also they do not implement or realize the second, critical task of the social sciences and I think that is very important. They are also mostly concerned with the past; they cannot, in fact, identify any universal regularities to be used in predicting the future. Thus, on the basis of their studies of the past, they are hardly able to say anything about the possible futures. What then is the point? Our actions are always oriented towards future. Of course we are oriented towards the past when we tell historical stories and plots connecting all these events in time in our everyday imagination, but nonetheless, action is also oriented towards future so we have to be able to say something about the future as well – both in terms of concrete utopias and realistic scenarios of different possibilities. Although prediction is impossible, if particular structures are at play and they interact in a particular way, we are likely to see a particular kind of future.<sup>14</sup>

MJ: This is also a connection to Galtungian tradition of peace research. The task of Peace

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<sup>14</sup> For further discussion on the methodology of futures studies, see Patomäki 2006.

research in this tradition is first a diagnosis, then prognosis and finally therapy.

HP: Well, for all kinds of reasons I have been slightly suspicious of this universal doctor metaphor behind it but otherwise I think its correct, yes. These are the three tasks in which we have to engage, but to be more specific, the problem is that, at least at certain level, it appears that medical sciences are, let us say, less interpretative and political than social sciences. It might be slightly misleading and dangerous, in certain contexts that you have that kind of allegedly certain knowledge about things in social world. Of course we know that many things are also political in the medical sciences, but I mean, at least the appearance is very different so it might be somewhat dangerous into carry that metaphor to social sciences.

I would like to go back a little and say something about social scientific explanation, nature of emancipation and truth in terms of violence. The basic point is, if truth is a normatively obligating notion and a kind of ethical virtue as well, and whatever we say is true about the world whether it is a statement, a model or a more general theory it is always based on a situated human judgment. And human judgments about truth are, in principle, of the same kind as other value-judgements even though they make references to the real and can use empirical evidence etc. It means that truth must necessarily be dialogical. My own conclusion from this is that if we, or I, make a truth judgment that actually implies some sort of emancipatory action of transformation, it cannot actually imply any authorization of any use of violence for we have to preserve the dialogical nature of that relation. Otherwise we would be committing a practical contradiction. It is not possible to emancipate people by means of violence. I am not a total pacifist; there might be some context where, for other normative reasons, the limited use of violence might be legitimate, but I mean that I do not think emancipation can ever imply violence in any sense of the term.

RB: Yes, I would actually make the case about emancipating other people even stronger. I don't believe that you can actually emancipate anyone else. Let's picture a situation: someone is stuck in a prison cell. You unlock the prison gates, you unlock the prison corridors and go up to the floor they're on. You unlock the door to their cell and you say

to them: “you’re free now”. OK, but the person still has to walk out of the door. I came from the left and I still am of the left politically, but my friends and comrades have great difficulty in seeing this. They’re so used to calling on people to emancipate society. This is “substitutionism”. We all have to emancipate our selves and of course the best thing is to engage in collective action which involves getting to see other people’s standpoints or getting into a situation where you can talk to them and plan out a joint campaign of action.

HP: Even in your example, the people who are unlocking all these prison doors are actually emancipating that particular prisoner. Of course you are right in the sense that we cannot do against the will of the particular prisoner, or who ever we are talking about; at that level, it is impossible to emancipate another. We would have to have them on our side in order to understand their need for emancipation and that they actually want to walk out of the prison door. But we would still be doing quite a few things by opening these prison doors.

RB: That’s absolutely correct. I mean that when we talk about emancipation one thing that I’ve increasingly come to see is that actually it’s a very basic and a very simple concept. When you want to achieve an objective you will see that probably in the way of this objective there will be a set of constrains and your project will take the form of removing or eliminating, getting rid of those constrains. That is the basic structure of an emancipatory argument. There is something there which is ok, and there is something there which is not ok and what you want to do in emancipatory action is get rid of that which is not ok. It really is as simple and as universal as that. When people ask me why critical realists place so much emphasis on emancipation, I have to say that it is not we as critical realists but we as human beings who place this emphasis. For the drive to emancipation is an extension of the structure of intentional action, involving commitment to the realization of human intentionality. The desire to be free is a logical extension of the desire to realize our objectives and wants in the world. We all have this desire, and necessarily as intentional agents. Thus, even if you’re doing something which is wrong, in doing it you are committed to the realization of your goals and for this you need to be

free to achieve them, which may contingently involve becoming free of certain things which currently constrain this.

When you start criticizing people's ends or objectives then you have to get into a different kind of action; a form of dialogical action in which you are going to start to see the other's standpoint and you are going to treat them as of equal right and equal validity as your self. You're going to have to carry out practice something like Marx's recipe for a socialist society: a society in which the free development of each was the condition of free development of all. There can't be any ego there when you're really trying to understand someone else. And actually in a dialogue you become the other, you're at one with the other and the other is at one with you. Then you can look at the competing perspectives of these two subjects and see whether you can reconcile them. Only when you've done that you can really test whether there are any moral incommensurabilities. And I don't believe there are. I also believe that you find something like Marx's vision in every secular, every religious, and every emancipatory tradition. Moreover, I argue that you also find it ubiquitously prefigured in everyday social practices, even in simple commercial transactions. For we have to trust each other to do anything, right or wrong, good or evil, altruistic or egoistic. We have to show reciprocity. We have to show solidarity. We do this the whole time.

### **Understanding and peace**

MJ: Understanding the 'others' is also one of the biggest problems in world politics. What kind of relation do you see between understanding and various global and local peace projects?

RB: I think a deeper understanding of the implications of task of social science which could be called critical hermeneutics is very important for peace research. The basic understanding here would be that social science at least in part stand in a subject relation to a set of subject-subject relations. That would be a double hermeneutic. Thus, very often what the social scientist or the peace researcher is doing is looking at cases where one or both parties in a subject-subject relation do not accord the other the status of being

an epistemological subject. This may be because they're in a master-slave relationship, which I see as a paradigm of injustice, or it may be because they're in violent conflict; it may even be because they've not noticed or for some or other reason, they're demonizing the other. There are lots of ways in which you can treat someone else or whole category of human beings as less than an epistemological subject. But when you don't like them, when you're at war with them, when you have a problem with them, that is just when you need from every point of view to understand the other as an epistemological subject. Because if you find someone's behaviour weird or absurd then that's when you have to ask seriously: "why are they doing that?", a question which presupposes that they have reasons and grounds for doing what they're doing, reasons and grounds which must be identified and understood. It's a challenging thing to do but that's the way we have to start to go.

Then you can say lot's of other things just from that bases. If you have some conception of the stratification of a person, you can also reflect on what sort of subject the person is. You could say that what you really want in a potential negotiation or dialogue with someone else is to have that other person in their best way: to have them at their most generous, at their just, their most loving and creative. That's the way they want to see you and then you have a model of an ideal negotiation of the parties in their ground state. You can see the Gandhian project as partly being an attempt to get through to the ground-state of the oppressor, to get for example the English soldier to remember that they were a human being and to start behaving like one in the way they were treating the Indians at the time.

Then I think we have to bring in the notion of the four planes of social being; and the need for peace on all these four planes. Thus peace at the level of the stratification of the personality, that is inner peace, being at peace with yourself, is a condition for producing or promoting peace at the other levels—because if you're not at peace with yourself, you're going to project your own internal wars on your social relations and all the other planes of social being as well. I've argued this line in terms of the spiritual turn – it is in my latest round of work, which I call the philosophy of meta-reality – which has brought me a lot of unpopularity but which I see as a logical development of critical

realism<sup>15</sup>. There is no commitment to any theological position. In these works it is given a completely secular vindication. Actually I think this is a very important model for peace research and for social campaigns in general. It's also very important for projects of democratization and indeed all the social project which involve collective action—for these all involve the idea of agents coming together at a level (the level which I call their ground-states) which will transcend and/or reconcile their competing and contingently conflicting partisan or sectarian human interests.

### **Philosophy and social science**

HP: The question that I would like to pose finally has to do with the power of philosophy. To what extent is it possible to resolve any of the major problems of world peace, problem of collective violence, or any other global political problem at the level of philosophy? To what extent does philosophy have the role of under-labourer and mid-wife of social sciences? I think we actually need social scientific explanations and models that are specific because in open systems only practical explanations are possible. We have to accept the fact that there are so many complicated processes going on at the moment that world history is open by definition; so all kinds of possibilities are open to humanity, including its self-destruction. There is no way that we can simply resolve these by way of a philosophical argument drawing a kind of total utopia about the final outcome of history, the end of history or of anything of that kind. We have to be prepared for openness and continuous struggle to develop better social scientific models of constantly changing realities.

RB: I believe that the best that philosophy can do is to be an under-labourer as you say and as I have stressed in many of my works. That's why we need very concrete social sciences. In the last couple of years I've been really becoming more and more involved in what you could call applied CR. I've been working with groups of critical realists or

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<sup>15</sup> Bhaskar 2000 remains the best-known articulation of the spiritual turn. However, in 2002 Sage India published a series of three books in "the Bhaskar series" that develop aspects of the philosophy of meta-reality further; Bhaskar 2002a,b,c. For a critical discussion by fellow critical realists, see e.g. McLennan 2000; Morgan 2003.

sympathetic to CR researchers who are working on very concrete problems. I'm also writing a book to be called *Applied Critical Realism*, which is thematizing topics like interdisciplinarity. This is under analyzed. Everyone professes a lip service to it but we don't have theory of it. But if you take a critical realist understanding of most events as generated in open systems, then you are always going to have a multiplicity of mechanisms involved. And very often and normally in the human domain you're going to have mechanisms at different levels, all of which are going to be necessary to a fully adequate explanation of the phenomenon in question in what I call a "laminated system". Thus in order to explain phenomena such as disabilities, we have to eschew the reductionism and unilinearity secreted by the Humean actualist model of causality and accept that physiological, psychological, socio-economic and cultural mechanisms are all involved.

But how do we begin to construct explanations in this sort of way? Most critical realists – myself included – have not paid sufficient attention to this and related problems in the domain of applied or concrete social science. I don't want to be too critical about us because after all no one else has done it either. But there's a tremendous amount of work to be done in the development of CR in an applied context. And actually there's much more underlabouring work that needs to be done. So I don't think this is the end of philosophy. It's not like "Critical realism has done it, it's there and now we can leave it on to social scientists". Social scientists are coming against new methodological and meta-theoretical problems and actually as this open schema develops there may be a need for more and deeper philosophy.

HP: What is universal for all social sciences is of course social ontology, and in principle epistemology. I would say that the main problem going against trans-disciplinarity in human and social sciences is the entrenched position of economics. Economics – like liberal political theory – makes a strict separation between things economic, and things social and political. As well, because of the mechanisms and relations of power in the global political economy, we now have the prevalence of this particular and very narrow form of economics: neo-classical economics, or orthodox economics. Neoclassical economics usually mystifies and reifies the role of mathematics in scientific explanations,

drawing a lot of its authority from the use of mathematical models that are too complex that for most people – including those who have actually studied the basics of economics – to follow their argument. I think that is the key problem at this moment in world history. One of the key challenges for those people who actually want to create something like trans-disciplinary human or social sciences, or even to go beyond that and also include some other sciences, is, first of, all to overcome the dichotomy of economics and other social sciences and write a kind of a new political economy as social theory.

RB: I totally agree with that. I think we do absolutely need a critique of the fetishism of economics today. I totally accept the thrust of what you're saying that these are concrete and empirical problems and these are questions that the social scientists have to articulate explanations, which philosophy doesn't pre-empt, can't pre-empt and shouldn't pre-empt. But what we also have to understand is the continuing role of philosophy in social science. For a start social science is concerned with concepts. So there's a level of conceptual articulation and then conceptual critique that it needs to do. I think a lot of basic or deep social science has taken a form that is pretty close to transcendental argument. You could say that Marx asked the sort of transcendental question when he asked: "what must be the case for society to express its self through the commodity form?" And that involved him in a whole series of arguments. There is also his classic discussion of fetishism and related phenomena. This is in relation to the mysticism of economics that is now greater than ever but in a slightly new, highly mathematized and technisized form and there we need critique. A critique of the poverty of the research practice and the poverty of the conceptual articulation in mathematicized neo-classical economics. And of course to do that you have to fully understand what economics is doing so you have to be a good mathematician.

HP: I agree with the logic of Marx's project, but I also think that Marx's own analysis was somewhat misleading for a number of reasons. For example, I have never accepted the labour theory of value. I think Marx used it to propose, implicitly, a Lockean theory of justice according to which all value is basically, ultimately produced by labour so, for that reason, all value ultimately also belongs to labour; that was his argument. Then he

tried to show that in the capitalist mode of production certain actors are positioned in such a way that they can extract a large portion of the surplus without actually doing anything; that was basically his argument, making it as simple as possible. I do not think you can make a similarly simple argument today. You need another kind of an economic theory. I think that the work of Tony Lawson, and many others, is very important.<sup>16</sup> They have in a sense been clearing the ground for a better economic theory but they have not thus far produced substantial economic theories themselves.

RB: There were some formulations of the distinction between the underlabourer conception of philosophy, with which I was in solidarity, and the master-scientist conception which can be misleading. If you look at the basic concepts of critical realism as a philosophy of social science, they include concepts of practice; you know, what is the structure of a practice? And you can't say that it's just an abstract concept, distinct from the world. It's something that is manifest in the world and that is where the thesis of "categorical realism" is so important. Philosophy does actually talk about the same world as the social sciences. It just talks about its more abstract features. Moreover I also believe that philosophy is subject to empirical control. In my ideal scenario there would be no difference between philosophy and social sciences. If I call myself a philosopher, it would just be because I was talking about the more abstract structures and layers of social reality. I see continuity between philosophy and the sciences.

HP: Oh yes, I have always worked with this model. I think I first learned it from Joachim Israel's book, *Language of Dialectics and the Dialectic of Language*<sup>17</sup>, where he explains how the method of Marx was to abstract a concept from a concrete context so proceeded to then analyze it there and then, and in a sense return it to fresh a re-analysis of the same context. Because after the analysis the concept or thing is not the same there is dialectical development. So we are moving between levels and learning. In certain works I have been moving at a rather high abstract level, but then there are very concrete writings where I, for instance, discuss critically certain topical policies, or technical details of the

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<sup>16</sup> See Lawson 1997; 2003.

<sup>17</sup> Israel, 1979.

mechanisms of global financial markets.

RB: I think the important point to stress is that the abstract is also part of reality. You know it has got to be put together again. You know it's got to be reconjugated again at a more concrete level to capture the explanatorily relevant totality. But the abstract is still a feature of reality. We have to begin to rethink the simplicity of distinctions we make between philosophy and social science. If you want to say how we are going to construct a better society or how we're going to have peace there, then this depends on creative social science. But creative social science is continuous with creative philosophy and there will be aspects of its work which will be philosophical. The important thing is to do correct philosophy, which is always philosophy engaged in a relation to more concrete levels.

HP: Indeed, perhaps you could put the idea this way: in the dialectical learning process of social sciences there are necessarily many philosophical moments.

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