**Chapter 2 :Critical realism in resonance with Nordic ecophilosophy**

**Roy Bhaskar - Critical Realism in Resonance with Nordic ecophilosophy: ecophilosophical themes in the development of critical realism, and critical realist themes in Nordic ecophilosophy – a serendipitous synergy**

On the whole there is a high degree of convergence between critical realism and Nordic ecophilosophy. In this chapter to bring out the resonances, counterpoints, synergies and contrasts between the two, I will look at them from the perspective of the development of critical realism [henceforth normally CR]. Ideally, this exercise would be repeated from the vantage point of Nordic Ecophilosophy [henceforth NEP]. To some extent this is indeed done in this book, in Chapters 1 and 4. However, because of the relative one-sidedness of my perspective in this chapter, let me say clearly at the beginning there are respects in which NEP has been stronger and better developed than CR. I am thinking in particular of the arenas of space and time, and the levels of social-cultural critique and perhaps popular engagement. Moreover, as perhaps one would expect, Nordic ecophilosophy has been generally much stronger, earlier, deeper and more persistent on ecological matters, while Arne Nӕss’ and Sigmund Kvaløy’s “spiritual turns” anticipated mine by a good twenty years or more. However what critical realism has done is to develop, and defend the development, of a philosophical ontology in which it is possible to describe the world, critique mis-descriptions of it (whether in philosophy, science or everyday life) and show why it has been so difficult to do both these things before. Thus in relation to this world which is patently in crisis, critical realism enables us to see more clearly than pre-existing philosophy permitted what needs to be done to improve both our understanding of it, and our practice in it. And, because of this, we can perhaps describe the value of the Nordic contributions more adequately than has hitherto been possible, as well as offering a robust framework for their further development.

In order to identify areas of possible contestation I shall earmark seven touchstone issues:-

(i) what is the nature of anti-anthropocentricity; in particular

(ii) must ethics must be anthropic?;

(iii) what are the grounds for and means of genuine ‘interdisciplinarity’?;

(iv) under what conditions is negentropy possible?; and in particular

(v) do ecological considerations dictate an end to growth?, and is this the same as the end of development?

(vi) is NEP inexorably, even if only tendentially, mono-disciplinary or reductionist?

(vii) can one identify self-correcting or homeostatic mechanisms at work in society, and if so how does this affect the nature of critique?

As is customary, I shall differentiate three phases in the development of critical realism:

* 1. Basic critical realism, consisting of transcendental realism, critical naturalism and the theory of explanatory critique;
	2. Dialectical critical realism; and
	3. The philosophy of metaReality

**Section 1: Basic critical realism**

**Transcendental realism**

The theme of anti-anthropocentricity is arguably the single most distinctive in critical realism[[1]](#footnote-1), and resonates with Nordic ecophilosophy from its 20th century origins in the tragic pessimism of Peter Zapffe.

There is a double argument at the outset of critical realism. This involves both an argument a) for ontology, and an argument b) for a new ontology. Each of these arguments is in turn duplex. Thus the argument for ontology involves at once an argument for a philosophical as distinct from a scientific ontology, and at the same time an argument for ontology as distinct from epistemology, the conflation of which is critiqued in the concept of the ‘epistemic fallacy’. And the argument for the new ontology involves both an argument for the distinctiveness of causal structures, generative mechanisms etc from patterns of events or empirical regularities (i.e. for the distinctiveness of the domains of the real and the actual {and thence the empirical} ) and an argument for the distinctiveness of open from closed systems. These two aspects of the argument for the new ontology are indices of course of the stratification and differentiation of the world.

Now the tradition of NEP, at least implicitly and in practice, generally differentiated ontology from epistemology, even if it did not always so clearly make the distinction. However, for the most part there was little, if any, differentiation between a philosophical and scientific ontology, that is between what the world must be like for certain activities to be possible and the detailed content given to the world by these activities. In general there was not a clearly worked out sense of a characteristic role for philosophy, as distinct from substantive science. For critical realism philosophy concerns itself with just the same world as we know in science and everyday life, but considers it from the point of view of its most abstract and general features, seeking to explicate, via its distinctive (e.g. transcendental) argumentative procedures, precisely what is presupposed by, but not articulated in, our substantive activities.

Similarly, when we turn to the argument for a new ontology, the distinctiveness of the open systems of the world from the closed systems of the laboratory has been well recognised in the NEP tradition. But, on the other hand, the distinction between the objects of scientific knowledge such as structures, mechanisms, etc and the patterns of events which they generate has not been so decisively registered. In general, the anti-empiricism of NEP has been grounded in recognition of the holistic, rather than stratified, character of reality. Clearly both are necessary.

The most graphic way of representing the anti-anthropocentricity explicit in critical realism is through the conceptualisation of what I have called four-planar social being[[2]](#footnote-2). This revolves around the idea that every social happening or event occurs on at least four planes:

1. the plane of material transactions with nature;
2. the plane of social interactions between people;
3. the plane of social structure *sui generis;* and
4. the plane of the stratification of the embodied personality*.*

The irreducibilty of the plane of material transactions with nature in the social world means that the material and natural character of what happens is an essential feature of all social explanations. However, the two-way transactions between human beings and nature must be interpreted in the light of an *ecological asymmetry*,[[3]](#footnote-3) weighted in favour of an overarching nature such that nature could exist without human beings, but not vice versa.

In general an acceptable form of anti-anthropocentricity for critical realism depends upon a three-fold set of relationships:

1. The ecological asymmetry, i.e. the existential independence of nature from human beings;
2. The essential dependence of human beings on nature; and
3. The natural character of human beings, i.e. the non-dualistic nature of the relationship between human beings and nature, such that human beings are natural, i.e. not only depend upon, but are constituted by, nature (and so are natural).

Together these three characteristics define a view of humanity as a species constellationally overreached and contained by (or englobed within) nature.

The theme of stratification within basic critical realism is itself a complex one. To the simple distinction between the domain of real and the actual we need to add the sense of the multi-tiered stratification of nature, so that the distinction between the domain of the real and the actual is revealed by the development of science to be iteratively reapplicable. Then, in this context of the multi-tiered stratification of nature, we need to add a further sense of the *emergence* of higher order states and properties of things from lower order states and properties. Here it is crucial to distinguish the possibility of a diachronic explanatory reduction from the existence at any moment of time, i.e. synchronically, of emergent powers and states. There are three criteria for the existence, synchronically, of such emergent states and properties:

1. the unilateral dependence of the higher order on the lower;
2. the taxonomic irreducibility of the higher order level (in describing and understanding higher order phenomena) from the lower order states; and, finally,
3. the causal irreducibility of higher order states in the generation of lower order phenomena.

We shall see in a moment how emergence illustrates a form of negentropy, which is also at work in the figure of progressive or dialectically sublatory change, which, albeit only partially and conditionally, qualifies the force of the entropy law of thermodynamics, introduced into ecological debates by Nicolas Georgescu-Roegen.

A fourth feature follows from evolution or the becoming, diachronically, of such synchronically emergent states and properties. This is :

1. the condition that the higher order state is implicit as a possibility in the lower order

state, in which we could also say it was ‘enfolded’.

1-3 above, together with (i)-(iv) above, begin to define the form of an acceptable anti-anthropocentricity. This is sketched in *Scientific Realism and Human Emancipation* (written for the most part in the late 1970’s though only published in 1986)as a *developing integrative pluralism*, in what is also characterised as a metaphysically Copernican-Darwinian world.

The distinction between open and closed systems (in CR the case of isolated systems is clearly differentiated from the case of constant ones[[4]](#footnote-4)) is important for both CR and NEP. Indeed, as Karl Georg Høyer notes in chapter 4 p23 below, one could say that the misapplication of technologies or results, developed or tested under closed conditions, to the open systemic world has been a major source of ecological error and indeed disaster. What CR attempts to do, however, is show under what conditions the application of closed systemic results to the open systemic world is possible and valid and under what conditions it is not. It is valid when what we have is a statement about the non-actual real, i.e. when it specifies the operation of a mechanism or structure, a tendency irrespective of its outcome, at the level of the real; not when what we have is or depends on a description or prediction of the occurrence of an event or state-of-affairs, at the level of the actual.

The necessity for interdisciplinarity follows from the combination of complexity and emergence, i.e. from the ubiquity of open systems characterised by entities and structures with emergent powers, liabilities and tendencies. Interdisciplinarity is of course also very much a theme prevalent in the NEP literature. But the conceptual underdevelopment in the NEP reflection on the stratification of nature has tended to result, from a CR point of view, in insufficient recognition of the role of *disciplinarity in interdisciplinarity*. For disciplinarity is an essential ingredient in interdisciplinarity, at least in so far as the distinct structures which are operative in the production of the phenomena to be explained need first to be understood in their own terms, before they can (and in order to) be correctly integrated in an interdisciplinary account. Thus in the NEP tradition we have the theme of interdisciplinarity as practiced by ‘generalists’, or even ‘super-amateurs’ (as distinct from specialists). I would prefer to say that it is dependent on the work of *cross-disciplinary understanding* and *effective epistemic integration*, mediated if necessary by the immanent critique and development of recalcitrant disciplines.

Now in general there are two distinct types of ontological grounds for interdisciplinarity: complexity and emergence, stressed at least in the first instance by critical realism, and holistic causality, emphasised by Nordic ecophilosophy. However these two modes can be shown, if rigorously analysed, to presuppose each other. Thus, on a CR account[[5]](#footnote-5), whereas for multidisciplinarity one requires the emergence of levels, for interdisciplinarity, in addition one requires the emergence of outcomes or results, i.e. a synthetic or novel outcome. This would seem to presuppose some degree of internal relationality between the interacting mechanisms. Similarly one only gets the need for multidisciplinarity or interdisciplinarity in the NEP argument, if the holistically interacting entities are indeed constituted at different ontological levels. So in practice complexity and emergence, on the one hand, and holistic causality, on the other, presuppose each other. CR has fully analysed both emergence and holistic causality[[6]](#footnote-6) and in *Interdisciplinarity and Climate Change[[7]](#footnote-7)* and elsewhere holistic causality assumes due importance in a second round of amplification of the basic RRREIC model of multi-mechanismic concrete explanation. In DCR of course emergence straddles 1M and 2E, while holistic causality belongs to 3L.[[8]](#footnote-8)

Once we get an ontological picture of the interdisciplinary case, as in the notion of a ‘laminated system’[[9]](#footnote-9), there remains of course the question of how we secure this in epistemological practice. For CR this requires cross-disciplinary understanding plus effective epistemic integration[[10]](#footnote-10), buttressed (if necessary, e.g. to secure referential overlap) by the immanent critique and development of wayward disciplines; whereas NEP would tend to rely on gifted “super amateurs” or “generalists”. However a degree or specialisation for the discovery and detailed description of the depth structures of the various sciences would seem to be inevitable, the important question being how to counter-balance it with sensitivity to the inputs of other disciplines. Here it is important to try to identify currently immanent tendencies that critique can latch on to guide/inform praxis. This is because, for an explanatory critique to be effective, it always needs to be accompanied both by a degree concrete utopianism and a theory of transition. In this last, at least ideally, one should identify (whenever possible) emergent tendencies, which are already moving in the necessary direction.

In practice the transition to an adequate epistemic integration or an authentic I-D explanation can be enormously aided by creative conceptual work. Thus different levels of reality can begin to be coherently related to each other through the notions of four planar and seven scalar social being.[[11]](#footnote-11)

**Critical naturalism**

The macro-dualisms which critical naturalism critiques and resolves, namely those of structure and agency, of methodological collectivism or holism versus individualism and of meaning and behaviour or law (and in a meta-theoretical key, of hermeneutics versus positivism, or anti-naturalism versus naturalism) are ultimately grounded for critical realism on the critique and resolution of certain micro-dualisms, namely between mind and body, reason and cause and fact and value, and also theory and practice. Crucial here is the notion of intentional causality, which links mind and matter, bypasses manichean dualism and alone potentially makes reason, and always, everywhere, actually makes thought (whether rational or not), efficacious in the world.

On the whole, while NEP does not theorise intentional causality, most of the work of Nordic ecophilosophers in the social domain is fully consistent with the emphases of the transformational model of social activity, oriented as it is against voluntarism and reification alike. In particular the Nordic ecophilosophers never doubted the need for social and collective action, as well as individual responses to the ecological crisis.

**The theory of explanatory critique**

Moreover, the Nordic ecophilosophers have on the whole accepted that facts can provide a rational basis for values, and they have engaged in forceful proto-explanatory critiques. However, the debate about values has left a problem, which turns on the fact that while human ethics is, in virtue of being action-guiding, necessarily concerned with the principles that govern human conduct, it cannot surely follow that these principles should encapsulate a false anthropic understanding of the place of human beings in the cosmos. In a re-enchanted world, value must exist in the world, whether human beings do or not. Value, like ontological truth, depends only on the possibility of language and ethics, a possibility which we know to be real, even if it were to be unactualised, or to become unactualised again, as it once was.

**Section 2: Dialectical critical realism**

**A. Emergence and dialectic; emancipation and shedding**

The first law of thermodynamics says that energy can neither be created nor destroyed. This is commonly known as the *law of conservation of energy*. The second law of thermodynamics states that when energy is used it moves towards increasing disorder and chaos. This is commonly known as the *law of entropy*

At first blush, the second law would seem to be contradicted by a number of phenomena in the biological and social spheres which appear to take on a negentropic form. In particular some changes and reorganisations appear to be moves in the direction of increasing order, inclusiveness, comprehensiveness or generality. These include:

(a) emergence and evolution in the biological sphere, which depend upon the energy of the sun or other free but finite natural sources;

(b) technological progress in the production, distribution or exchange of material goods or services;

(c ) dialectical sublation or progress in social organisation or ideas, and indeed learning generally.

Now so long as consciousness, thought or discourse is regarded as a free resource, then (c) does indeed assume a negentropic form. And ecology as an orientation or discipline, or learning or applying it, only makes sense if these activities are indeed negentropic. But in practice, consciousness or ideation is never an infinite resource, and it is always in the human world dependent upon finite material resources; as such the history of at least human consciousness and self-conscousness must always be seen under the aspect of, and as ultimately constrained by, the biological geo-history and circumstances of the human species. This is in turn inscribed within the planetary history of species and genera, itself embedded in the geo-physical history of the solar system, and ultimately the universe. However, that said, in so far as changes in ideas and social forms consume no more energy, they do indeed escape the consequences of the second law of thermodynamics

However one cannot be so sanguine about alleged technical progress in the case of material, as distinct from purely conceptual, goods. Because what is technical progress or greater efficiency cannot be defined in economic terms without being defined in terms of its contribution to human well-being as a whole, and this cannot be defined from a non-anthropic standpoint except in terms of its contribution to the well-being of other species as well and the planet as a whole.

Indeed, as is now slowly becoming recognised:

(a) there is no question of maintaining current levels (and forms) of economic activity and current expectations about Pareto-optimal growth (whereby no one becomes worse off) within environmentally sustainable limits (not least for a rising human population as a whole). Rather

(b) what is required is net degrowth together with a radical redistribution of wealth, resources and energy – use for the planetary human population as a whole (plus stabilisation of its size at a tenable level). This will be taken up again towards the end of the chapter, when we shall see how the philosophy of metaReality entails a policy of shedding and radical simplification (de-complication in Sigmund Kvaløy terms) for enhanced well-being-development for the well-off citizens of the well-off ‘North’.

**B. 1M – 7Z/A**

In post-basic CR, there are altogether seven levels through which ontology is progressively deepened. The first level or moment, 1M, corresponds roughly to that of pre-dialectical, basic critical realism (at least *qua* transcendental realism). 1M thematises

being as such and being as non-identity, difference and structure.

The second level or edge, 2E, thematizes

being as containing absence and negativity, and thus as involving change, process and

development

while the third level, 3L, thematises

being as together or as a whole, and so being as a totality

and the fourth level or dimension, 4D, treats

being as incorporating transformative agency.

The fifth level or aspect, 5A, presupposes

being as involving reflexivity, and comprehends it as spiritual and involving inwardness.

The sixth realm, 6R, understands

being as re-enchanted, incorporating meaning and value:

while the seventh zone or awakening, 7Z/A, treats

being as prioritising identity over difference and unity over antagonism and split, and as involving non-duality.

In DCR we are only concerned with 1M-4D.

**1M**

1M takes its starting point from the critique of the Humean theory of causal laws (with its repetitive and shallow anthropism), together with the critique of the epistemic fallacy and an emphasis on the open-systemic nature of the world, entailing, given the phenomena of complexity and emergence, the necessity for interdisciplinarity. The critique of empiricism and neo-Kantianism can be developed to identify the effects of a complementary triangle formed by the classical paradigm of action (as atomistic and mechanical), the celestial closure apparently achieved by Newtonian mechanics and a model of (tacitly gendered, propertied and European) man, as egocentric and unrelated to other beings[[12]](#footnote-12). What lies behind the anthropocentricity so often detected by ecologically sensitive critics of orthodox or mainstream philosophy is in fact an *egocentricity*. This egocentric atomism together with an abstract universality lies at the heart of the philosophical discourse of modernity. We can see this discourse signalled already in Descartes’ famous *cogito* “I think, therefore I am”. In prioritising thought over being, Descartes prioritises epistemology over ontology and thought over body and emotion (not to mention the possibility of spirit). In prioritising the “I”, Descartes privileges human beings over other species (and nature generally), and the speaker over society and other people.

I have described the development of the discourse of modernity in detail elsewhere[[13]](#footnote-13) but a brief resume may be in order here. The philosophical discourse of modernity is structured by an atomistic egocentricity and an abstract universality. I have already noted how, in the Cartesian cogito, a self- defining subject is set against a given world, so that subject is opposed to object, and indeed other subjects. This quickly leads to the Hobbesian war of all against all, and a situation in which we are related to things outside ourselves only by Humean appetites and aversions, desire and fear. The defining couple of this discourse, atomistic egocentricity and abstract universality, quickly generate other philosophically significant and pernicious properties, including an incomplete totality and lack of reflexivity, unilinearity, followed by judgmentalism and disenchantment, (reductionist) materialism, formalism and functionalism, and above all ontological monovalence.

The philosophical discourse of modernity may be conveniently divided into five phases, each marked by a revolutionary upheaval or transformation. The classical discourse of modernity is marked by the English civil war of 1640-1660 and the French revolution of 1789. The phase of high modernism may be associated with the revolutionary upheavals of 1848 and 1917. The theory of modernisation may be associated with the momentous events of 1945, 1947 and 1949. Postmodernism, together with the rise of the new social movements, can in turn be related to the revolutionary upsurges of 1968 and the early 1970s. The fifth phase of the discourse of modernity, which I call bourgeois triumphalism, followed on quickly from the collapse of the Soviet bloc in 1989-91. This goes together with a resurgence of fundamentalism, both market and religious, and chauvinisms of various kinds.

I have further argued that this phase can be differentiated into three sub-phases, with the first sub-phase of globalisation ending with 9/11, and the second sub-phase of the War on Terror ending with the credit crunch of 2007-8. We are now entering a period of multi-polarity, with new possibilities and challenges.[[14]](#footnote-14)

**2E**

NEP, most comprehensively in the work of Torsten Hagerstrand, emphasizes the irreducibility of place and tense, the concrete country cousins of abstract space and time, most specifically in concepts such as that of landscape or (geo-historical) trajectory. Dialectical critical realism is very sympathetic to this, and develops its own concepts such as that of a rhythmic or the tri-unity of space, time and causality and the presence of the past (or future) to designate the irreducibility of organic tensed, as distinct from reversible clock, time and of concrete places as distinct from abstract spaces.

However, at 2E above all, dialectical critical realism engages the critique of ontological monovalence, and together with it, the endism and triumphalism which has been so characteristic of modernistic discourses. The critique of ontological monovalence is a major metacritical gain of DCR, presupposed in practice by our notions of real change and intentional agency, but necessary also (or so I have claimed) for any being at all.

Indeed I have argued that the absence of absence is one of the three great failings of Western philosophy, together with the epistemic fallacy and what I have called the “Platonic-Aristotelian fault line”, which is an index of actualism and the de-stratification consequent upon the epistemic fallacy.[[15]](#footnote-15)

However, it seems to me now that there is another failing of Western philosophy, which is almost as important as these three- so much so that one could almost style it as the fourth great error, though it also follows pretty immediately from the unholy trinity. This mistake is consequent upon the *atomicity* typically invoked within the Western philosophical tradition, i.e., the absence of any space within the entities it posits or invokes. This atomicity, or *lack of* *any space within* or interior, results in the absence of any concept of inwardness, and a corresponding fetishization of the outer “external” world. Atomicity here chimes in with egocentricity and results in an ideology of what we could call “externalism”, which includes and depends on extensionalism”. This fetishism of outwardness results in the elision or collapse of inwardness, including inner depth, reflexivity or even a coherent concept of the self. Externalism at its most extreme gives rise to behaviourism. Outlawing internal relations, it precludes hermeneutics (and empathy) and results in a shallow depthless view of human beings, and motivation, as involving the absence of an interior, of *any space within.* There is no room for intentionality, for the plane of the stratification of the embodied personality, for indeed any psychology worthy of the name. And the whole domain of metaReality is rendered invisible and ineffable. Indeed, it can only be revealed by a kind of ‘symptomatic reading’, which might be termed an *ecstatic reading*, in which the inner can be seen to stand out for, in and by itself and its kind.

**3L**

The first concept of the inward is however simply that of internal relations, which is the philosophically most important concept of 3L. Internal relations are the basis for holistic causality and the grouping of things together and as a whole, and therefore into totalities, and thus into distinctive and identifiable natural kinds, including the concrete singulars of the world. Together with this circle of concepts goes concrete universality and singularity, constellationality, reflexivity and the unity of theory and practice or what I have called “seriousness”[[16]](#footnote-16).

**4D**

The critical realist theme of transformative praxis resonates with the NEP theme of meaningful work at 4D. And here there are interesting parallels with the DCR critique of irrealism, structured around the combination of anthroporealism and transcendent realism.

At the heart of anthroporealism lies egocentricity and abstract universality, resulting in a repetitive uniformity and inner emptiness, a Macdonaldized world. This vista of the incessant production of sameness and nothingness, however both always leaves traces of something determinate, a definite footprint and always (or so the philosophy of metaReality will claim) depends upon human ingenuity and teamwork, definite degrees of inter-human solidarity and skill.

The necessary complement to anthroporealism, the reduction of being to a superficialised knowledge, is an imaginary transcendent realism, required to compensate for it. At the heart of transcendent realism lies various imaginaries, in which reality TV, a lottery ticket, the cult of celebrity, window gazing in the shopping malls of the idle ‘filthy rich’, the promotion of one’s football team in a different culture the other side of the world, co-mingle in a fantasy world of Disneyfication, the imaginary rewards for real drudgery.

 However, just as the world of the repetition of the same leaves definite traces and residues on material reality, so does the surrogate world of fantasy necessitate and depend on definite psychic states and real changes, however seemingly shallow (at least from the outside), in real human beings.

The philosophy of metaReality goes further than NEP in arguing that within the world of exploitation and illusion, of demi-reality, of the industrial growth society, or of Sigmund Kvaloy’s corrosive ACID, there is a level of the metaReal which is its basis.

**3. Philosophy of metaReality (PMR)**

Both Arne Nӕss and Sigmund Kvaløy have been concerned of course with the inward and spiritual in the development of their ecophilosophies. However as Trond Jakobsen has pointed out in his chapter in this book, their ecophilosophies depend on radically different cosmologies. The emphasis in Arne Nӕss’ case is very much on considerations drawn from 3L and to an extent 7Z/A in the IM-7Z/A deepening of ontology, while Sigmund Kvaløy gives a very second edge (2E) analysis. It is of course a philosophical advantage of critical realism that it can accommodate both.

If basic CR allows the non-aporetic situation of change, it is the claim of DCR to be able to sustain a coherent account and analysis of change, namely as the absenting of something formerly present and/or the presenting of what was absent. In PMR our concern shifts to bringing it about. It is the being of the becoming, the change you would realize or bring about.

The philosophy of metaReality is not an otherworldly philosophy; and the spirituality it identifies is immanent, and indeed actual (not just possible).[[17]](#footnote-17) However, the conceptions of identity and unity in PMR are very different from the conceptions of identity and unity prevalent in mainstream philosophy. For instance, the identity involved is rich, differentiated and holistically developing.

There are three senses in which social life presupposes the priority of identity. These involve respectively: identity as non-duality, which is the mode of constitution or reproduction and transformation of social life; identity as basis or ground state; and identity as deep interior. There are in turn four forms of non-duality: transcendental identification in consciousness, transcendental agency, transcendental holism or teamwork and the transcendental self. And the self for its part must be analysed in a tri-partite way. On this analysis, it consists of an absolute ground state, a relative and shifting embodied personality and an always illusory ego. This sets for human beings the twin goals of achieving or restoring consistency between the embodied personality and the ground state and the elimination of the illusory ego.

When the embodied personality of the self is inconsistent with its ground state, the intentionality of the agent will be split. Self-realisation depends on the unification or restoration of consistency between embodied personality and ground state. Self-realised human beings may be said to be ‘negatively complete’, but positive completeness depends additionally on the abolition of all oppressive or master-slave-type relations and the elimination of all heteronomous states on all four planes of social being, together with the clearing up of their material residues. Together the criteria for negative and positive completeness deepen the criteria for the satisfaction of a ‘eudaimonistic society’, by elucidating further necessary conditions for human well-being and flourishing. This in turn allows us to identify the ways in which the project of universal self-realisation both extends and is required by the axiology of freedom in DCR.

The foregoing is then developed in an argument in which the domain of the spiritual or metaReal is seen to be the ubiquitous presupposition of the practices of everyday life, which are conducted for the most part in terms of the categories of the world of duality and under the influence of that exploitative, oppressive and categorically false part of it which I have called ‘demi-reality’.This practical presupposition may be illustrated by the way in which trust underpins commercial transactions, or the way in which war presupposes some peaceful activities, a degree of peace, but not vice-versa, and the way in which we use our creative ingenuity to stay stuck or addicted, or our loving concern to fuel a host of negative emotions, from jealousy to hatred. All these forms exemplify an *axiological asymmetry*  in which we can have the normally under-recognized good or heavenly state without the eye-catching and dominant bad or hellish state, but not the other way round.

This has profound implications for our understanding, critique and replacement of the demi-real world of alienation, oppression and growing inequity and injustice.

Thus though the resonances are strong between NEP and PMR, especially perhaps in the case of what Arne Nӕss called ‘ecophilosophy T’, what needs to be unequivocally registered is that social reality could not exist for a moment without its spiritual infrastructure, which is its basis, mode of constitution and deep interior, or so PMR argues. Thus there is a limit to the production of nothing, non-places, non-things. It is the labour, creativity of real people as it involves real places, landscapes, trajectories , sinks and sources; a labour which involves real compassion, solidarity and trust. The theorem of the impossibility of ecological neutrality must be accompanied by that of the *inexorability of human engagement.* Nothing truly can happen, at least in the social world, without it.

Thus there is no society without human agency, and no human agency without both non-duality and the ground state.

Together with the production of nothing (in NEP critique) in a Macdonaldised world goes the consumption of nothing in the Disneyfied world of fantasy. But to work, the fantasy must touch a human heart, evoke a cathected aeffect, however shallowly. The human being must operate the machine and choose to play out one or other kind of narrative as the story of her life.

If the metaReal is an unacknowledged but real substructure of social life, for the most part conducted and conveyed at the level of, and in the idiom of, the world of duality but under the sway/dominance of the demi-real, then we can say all of three things. We have the *metaReal* (a) *in* (b) *under and* (c) *against the actual.[[18]](#footnote-18)* The metaReal is certainly in, and a part of, though a largely unrecognized part of, the actual; it is certainly dominated by the world of duality, and the world of demi-reality within the latter; but, especially if developed in the concrete utopian imagination, it depicts and holds out a vision, albeit one only instantiated in microcosm, of a better way of doing things, of an alternative order of human being and social life.

There is another consequence of great moment for our crisis today. PMR affirms that the only way of avoiding a split intentionality, and the failure and unhappiness that inevitability ensues, is to eliminate the inconsistencies between the ground state, which one cannot lose, and the rest of one personality. This will involve the shedding both of the ego, the illusory sense of a separate ‘I’, and of the heteronomous characteristics in the embodied personality, i.e. those features of it which are inconsistent with its ground state. This will inexorably involve a simpler, but inwardly richer and deeper existence.

This in turn will inevitably involve:

1) degrowth; and

2) the enhanced use of underdeveloped powers of humanity, together with aids to them such as IT technology.

1) Karl Georg Høyer and Petter Nӕss have elegantly argued for the importance of uncoupling economic growth from the objective of environmental sustainability, suggesting that trying to marry these objectives presupposes “an unrealistically high degree of eco-technological efficiency increase” (chapter 14, p17). The upshot is a double impossibility theorem: it is not possible to have growth and ecological viability, and because it is not possible to have capitalism without growth, it is also not possible to have ecological viability with capitalism.

An end to growth is not however the same as an end to development. In two senses- first on the terrain of economics, in the context of a world of growing inequalities, there needs to be a radical redistribution in favour of the poor, sick or disabled, the young and the old, the oppressed and the needy; together with this redistribution we must encourage a flowering of new transitional and ecologically friendly technologies, discovered or invented and produced and functioning without any overall increase, and preferably with a decrease (the larger the better), in the use of energy; and with this also must come a profound re-organisation of our life-long learning, so that we learn to enjoy and share not just information, but knowledge, ideas and wisdom, and to become adept in the skills of the imagination and the arts of empathy. Thus in learning to become one with the other one is (or thinks one is) not, we learn that we need no longer bear the pain of the repression or exclusion of a part of oneself. Secondly, development will take place at the level of the greater fulfilment of our individual and collective human nature, consistently with our responsibilities to other species and unborn generations, that is, towards the goal of universal human flourishing, and of the free flourishing of each as a condition of all.

2) This can be illustrated by considering the phenomenon of hypermobility, incessant travel in fuel-guzzling cars and planes. Thus is there any real need for most, perhaps 95%, of the passenger flights from say Northern Europe to the continent of Australasia. If one wants to go to Australia, perhaps to take in the Sydney Opera House or Gold Coast in Queensland or Uluru, why not watch a film or video of them, or go on the internet or make a telephone call to a friend there or read a book or talk to and empathize with someone who has been there. Of course one will have to do a bit of inner work, delve into one’s inward space a bit, to use one’s imagination. But how much more rewarding, and better for oneself and the planet, including of course Australia, than a 20-hour flight! Again, who really needs to go to the Grand Canyon, at least just to *see* it, when they can experience it on film? Our aided imagination, and consciousness generally can take the place of an enormous amount of our current travel.

Two final questions remain:

(a) Are there any intrinsic limits to alienation in four planar social being?

The Philosophy of metaReality identifies a limit to the alienation and crisis we experience at each of the four planes of social being. At the plane of social interactions between people, this comes from the irreducibility of transcendental identication in consciousness in social interaction, manifest in the consideration that even when we do not agree, we must to some extent understand each other (even to mark our disagreement); and even where we do not understand each other, we can at least make out the words the other is uttering; and even when we cannot do this, we can at least hear them. Similarly the person who is split ten different ways or hears ten different voices, at least *hears* the different voices- there may be ten different voices, but there is only one listener, there is one person who is split, a real self on which to build, from which to bootstrap. This then is the limit at the plane of the stratification of the embodied personality. The limit at the plane of material transactions with nature comes from the fact that human beings are natural beings. Nature is not apart from us, we are a part of it. The destruction of nature is not only murder, but suicide, and must be treated as such.

The case of the plane of social structure *sui generis* is more complex, and best discussed by reference to an example, such as the recent credit crunch. The solution here is the re-embedding of money in the real economy, and the re-embedding of the real economy in the social and political infrastructure on which it depends, together with the re-embedding of the social infrastructure in its metaReal spiritual substructure. In the case of the social structure and our transactions with nature, more than individual intentionality and agency is required. We need collective decision-making and action of course, and here PMR invokes the the axioms of universal solidarity and axial rationality, which serve to bridge alleged incommensurabilities and opposed interests.[[19]](#footnote-19)

(b) Is there a sense in which, as Trond Jakobsen charges, NEP is tendentially reductionist, in so far as it is committed to a basically mono-disciplinary – and ecological - account of reality, albeit it is accepted that an ecological account will be a holist one? Here I leave the reader to peruse his argument in Chapter 13. As I understand it, his argument is that critical realism, at least in its full 1M-7Z/A development, offers a more comprehensive philosophical ontology and a fuller range of options than the ecological paradigms which at least Arne Nӕss and Sigmund Kvaløy relied on; and that moreover at the level of substantive scientific ontology, their ecological vision needs to be supplemented by the ontologies of other sciences, disciplines and practices, including in principle folk wisdom and popular imaginaries. This will be true especially, but not only, in the case of those planes of social being other than that of our material transactions with nature.

Certainly no-one would deny that NEP has focussed on ecological aspects and issues. Clearly these are not the only issues and aspects, even if, in so far as they represent an absolute constraint for humanity, they can be said to be conjuncturally the most important ones, the *sine qua non* for any other good idea or dream. However, that said, what we have to consider is the possibility that capturing and describing the non-ecological aspects will unlock the mechanisms, at the level of human agency and social structure, to a transformed transformative practice in relation to our natural environment, based on principles of care and responsibility for our natural environment, of which we are currently such a destructive part.

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1. MinGyu Seo “Bhaskar’s Philosophy as Anti-Anthropism: A Comparative Study of Eastern and Western Thought”, *Journal of Critical Realism* 7(1) 2008, pp 5-29. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. See *Scientific Realism and Human Emancipation*, 1986/2009, Routledge, London, p130; *Dialectic: the Pulse of Freedom*, 1993/2008, Routledge, London, p160 [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. See *Scientific Realism and Human Emancipation*, p141 [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. See *A Realist Theory of Science*, 1975/2008, Routledge, London, p76. [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. See my “Contexts of Interdisciplinarity” in *Interdisciplinarity and Climate Change,* edited by Roy Bhaskar, Cheryl Frank, Karl Georg Høyer, Petter Nӕss and Jenneth Parker, Routledge, 2010, Chapter 1 [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. See e.g. *Scientific Realism and Human Emancipation* and in *Dialectic: The Pulse of Freedom.* [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
7. See Chapter 1. [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
8. See Dialectic Pulse of Freedom, Chapters 2.7 and 3.8. [↑](#footnote-ref-8)
9. See Roy Bhaskar and Berth Danermark, “Metatheory, interdisciplinarity and disability research: a critical realist perspective”. *Scandinavian Journal of Disability Research*, 8(4), p288. [↑](#footnote-ref-9)
10. These are meta-theoretically underpinned by the principles of universal solidarity and axial rationality but in practice presuppose major changes in our educational system, in terms of much later and less than full specialisation, and the encouragement of hermeneutic sensitivity and the empathic arts generally [↑](#footnote-ref-10)
11. See Bhaskar and Danermark, op.cit p289; and “Contexts of Interdisciplinarity”, pp 8-10 [↑](#footnote-ref-11)
12. See *A Realist Theory of Science*, p198. [↑](#footnote-ref-12)
13. See *Reflections on metaReality*, Chapters 1 and 4. [↑](#footnote-ref-13)
14. See Roy Bhaskar with Mervyn Hartwig, *The Formation of Critical Realism*, Routledge 2010. Chapter 9. [↑](#footnote-ref-14)
15. See *Dialectic: the Pulse of freedom*, Chapter 4, *Plato etc*., 1994/2009, Routledge, London, Chapters 8-10 and Appendix, and c.f. also Alan Norrie, *Dialectic and Difference: Dialectical Critical Realism and the Grounds for Justice*, Routledge, London 2010, Chapters 6-8. [↑](#footnote-ref-15)
16. NEP has always encouraged a close relationship between theory and practice. [↑](#footnote-ref-16)
17. See *Reflections on metaReality*, 2002/2011, Routledge, London, *From Science to Emancipation*, 2002/2011, Routledge, London and the *Philosophy of metaReality: Creativity, Love and Freedom*, 2002/2011, Routledge, London; and also my forthcoming *A Brief Introduction to metaReality,* Routledge, London, 2012. See also Mervyn Hartwig and Jamie Morgan, *Critical Realism and Spirituality*, Routledge, 2011. [↑](#footnote-ref-17)
18. To borrow Alan Norrie’s lapidary formulation in his *Dialectic and Difference: Dialectical Critical Realism and the Grounds for Justice*, Routledge 2010, see Chapters 5-7. [↑](#footnote-ref-18)
19. See my “Theorising Ontology” in *Contributions to Social Ontology*, ed. Clive Lawson et al, Routledge, 2007, pp200-03, “Contexts of Interdisciplinarity” in *Interdisciplinarity and Climate Change* edited by Roy Bhaskar et al, pp 18-19 and *The Formation of Critical Realism*, p198. [↑](#footnote-ref-19)