Towards a Critical Realist Ethics

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I, Onur Özmen confirm that the work presented in this thesis is my own. Where information has been derived from other sources, I confirm that this has been indicated in the thesis.

Abstract

This work is an extrapolation, critical analysis, defence and development of critical realist (CR) moral philosophy. CR's main contribution to ethics is considered to be its theory of explanatory critiques (TEC), which rests on moral realism and ethical naturalism, at a critical distance from both utilitarianism and Kantian abstract universalism. In this thesis I argue for the necessity of a realist metaphysics for an emancipatory ethics, recasting the realist character of this metaphysics in terms of anti-anthropism; I show how TEC works in practice by portraying Marx's analysis of the capitalist mode of production as a paradigm case; and I discuss the history of the dialecticisation of CR, focusing on ethical categories. I argue that this dialecticisation does not only inherit TEC, but sublates it, ushering in novel concepts in a shift from a formal refutation of 'Hume's law' to a deeper ontology with substantial anthropological underpinnings. I situate the precursors of CR's ethics in ancient Greek philosophy, and I lay out the distinctly Aristotelian, Marxian and dialectical characteristics of CR's ethico-politics. More particularly, I align CR more closely with virtue theory than the other two major contemporary ethical positions, i.e. consequentialism and deontology, and suggest that virtue theory, once supported with a robustly realist, properly socialized and emancipatory philosophical footing, could be strong allies with CR. I try to show that in fact the greatest contribution of CR to moral philosophy might lie in building the groundwork for a thoroughly dialectical and social critical transformation of virtue theory. Throughout the thesis I hope to provide a full extraction and defence of Bhaskar's *dialectical* moral philosophy, an original and critical interpretation of the history of its development with an emphasis on notions from ancient Greek ethics, and draw the contours of a critical realist development of virtue theory.

Impact Statement

Let me briefly sketch the kinds of impact this thesis might have within and outside philosophical scholarship. In critical realist (CR) literature, I hope the novel thematization in this thesis of Roy Bhaskar's *Dialectic* with ancient Greek ethical notions and theoretical inclinations will help situate it more fairly and accurately in the broader history of ideas, while the original account of the history of the development of critical realism itself provided here will help to acknowledge in a fuller way the radicality of some of the steps it takes in proceeding from the pre-dialectical phase of Bhaskar's work. I suggest that there is an extremely fertile ground in the ethics of dialectical critical realism that is yet to bear fruit, and this requires a much more direct engagement with moral philosophy at large. I believe the case I make throughout this work in favour of the virtue theory tradition could motivate scholars from both CR and virtue theory to pursue the possibility of a critical yet mutually enriching relation. The emphasis I put on the dialectical notions of totality and alethia, I argue, could also lay down the grounds for the necessity of uniting various types of emancipatory politics, and a deepening of humanistic ethical-political concerns into ecological and environmental realms.

Bhaskar's idea that the task of philosophy is to underlabour for human flourishing, of which I offer a sustained defence and development in this thesis, has an even more immediate bearing on non-academic circles. Aristotle, in his *Nicomachean Ethics* has famously remarked that the goal of his theories is not only understanding ethics, but becoming good. I argue in this thesis that CR proceeds along very similar lines, and can expand and deepen the context of ethics by properly socializing and ecologizing the question of how we should live. This thesis is a metatheory that strives, following the footsteps of *Dialectic*, to expand our circles of care from human being to social existence to nature and eventually to being as such, and underlabour for practices oriented towards transforming the psychological and social structures that are obstacles to such expansion.

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List of Abbreviations

Abbreviations of Works by Roy Bhaskar

DPF/*Dialectic*	2008	*Dialectic: The Pulse of Freedom*
ECS	2016	*Enlightened Common Sense: The Philosophy of Critical Realism*
ONN	2017	*The Order of Natural Necessity: A Kind of Introduction to Critical Realism*
PIF	2011	*Philosophy and the Idea of Freedom*
PON	1998	*The Possibility of Naturalism: A Philosophical Critique of the Contemporary Human Sciences*
RR	2011	*Reclaiming Reality: A Critical Introduction to Contemporary Philosophy*
RTS	2008	*A Realist Theory of Science*
SE	2012	*From Science to Emancipation: Alienation and the Actuality of Enlightenment*
SRHE	2009	*Scientific Realism and Human Emancipation*

Abbreviations of Works by Other Authors

Dictionary	2007	*Dictionary of Critical Realism*, ed. Mervyn Hartwig
ER	1998	*Critical Realism: Essential Readings*, ed. Margaret Archer et al.

Abbreviations of Frequently Used Terms

BCR/OCR	Basic critical realism/original critical realism
CR	Critical realism
DCR	Dialectical critical realism
EC/TEC	Explanatory critique(s)/Theory of explanatory critiques
PMR	The philosophy of metareality

Prolegomenon

What is Critical Realism? - A Short History

Critical realism (sometimes CR from now on) is a philosophical approach that started to emerge in the late 1970s, initially mainly through the seminal works of the British philosopher Ram Roy Bhaskar (1944-2014), and later through the collective theoretical efforts of many others including Mervyn Hartwig, Andrew Collier, Alan Norrie, Margaret Archer, Caroline New, Kathryn Dean, Ruth Groff, Tony Lawson and Andrew Sayer to name several. Over the decades it grew into an international intellectual movement joined and developed by a much broader spectrum of scholars in the humanities and human sciences encompassing philosophers, social scientists, psychologists, anthropologists, historians, economists, archaeologists, linguists and others who came together around common themes and concerns in philosophy of science (including both natural and social science), critical social theory (especially of a socialist, feminist and environmentalist cast) and dialectical thought, but also many who carry no academic affiliations such as activists and people who are in other non-institutionalized ways engaged in meta-theoretical practice for human emancipation. It has facilitated a large body of systematic abstract theoretical work, organized empirical research and critical analysis in ways such as providing a meta-theoretical framework, a methodology, a critical conceptual 'arsenal' or simply generic intellectual inclinations. It is continuing to *underlabour* (a concept Bhaskar borrows from the British empiricist John Locke, on which more later) for emancipatory projects in both theoretical and practical forms.

CR's main philosophical tenets and features are:

(1) an *ontological realism* established by a transcendental method of philosophical argument combined with an immanent critique of contemporary rival theories, situating the relative independence of objects of inquiry from the inquirers and contending that in an act of referring, the referrer is able to detach herself from the referent, without losing respect of the natural condition

that all epistemic inquiries are mediated by discourse and carry the stamp of limited human cognition;

(2) a *critical naturalism* and a *critical hermeneutics* combined, according to which social theory can be scientific in the same sense, but not the same way, as natural science, and hermeneutics is an indispensable part of explanation in the human sciences;

(3) acknowledgement of the possibility (and actuality) of *explanatory critiques*, such that facts can produce values and social theory can be at once explanatory and critical and conditionally decree the transformation of social structures without violating principles of scientific thinking such as objectivity;

(4) an *epistemic perspectivism, fallibilism, and (geo-)historicity*, together with a rejection of foundationalism and scientism, appreciating a level of relativity and the possibility of both negative and positive change in science, which is patently successful to some degree, but like any other human practice, is subject to social and historical constraints, harnessed by

(5) a *judgemental rationality* according to which it is possible to assess and evaluate the strengths of competing theories according to some rationally grounded (but nevertheless themselves also historically and socially conditioned) (meta-)criteria;

(5) a thorough dialecticisation of the main categories hitherto employed, inheriting the roots of dialectic in Socratic argument, particularly philosophical *elenchus* (as opposed to its Sophistic form, *eristic*), and carrying forward the torch of dialectic by arguably resuming Marx's unfinished project of a materialist sublation of Hegelian thought; and

(6) in the philosophy of meta-reality, a secular conception of spirituality informed heavily by eastern philosophical and religious resources which nonetheless intends to unify some aspects of western and eastern spiritual traditions in a way that it purports to be compatible with all faith and no faith. This conception has a radically optimistic notion of the self, and an understanding of self-realization and spiritual enlightenment that is based not on complete isolation from society nor an ascetic renunciation of worldly and material concerns, but on the contrary, on active engagement

with, and social transformation of, the existing state of social and environmental affairs: that is, a spirituality for changing ourselves and the world.

It is helpful to elaborate on these tenets by following the stages of Bhaskar's philosophical output. In a rough but useful and popular way of presenting these stages, Bhaskarian critical realism consists in

1) 'basic' or 'original' critical realism (BCR), which is made up of

1a) transcendental realism (TR), the main thesis of *A Realist Theory of Science* (1975, RTS),

1b) critical naturalism (or critical hermeneutics) (CN), the upshot of *The Possibility of Naturalism: A Philosophical Critique of the Contemporary Human Sciences* (1979, PON) and

1c) the theory of explanatory critiques (TEC), brought forth in (1b) for the first time but elaborated most fully in *Scientific Realism and Human Emancipation* (1986, SRHE);

2) dialectical critical realism (DCR), introduced in *Dialectic: The Pulse of Freedom* (1993, DPF) and shortly after reiterated extremely concisely with minor modifications and put into a broad context in the ambitiously-titled *Plato Etc.: The Problems of Philosophy and Their Resolution* (1994, PE); and

3) the philosophy of meta-reality (PMR), covered in *From Science to Emancipation* (2002), *The Philosophy of Meta-Reality* (2002), and *Reflections on Meta-Reality* (2002).[1]

[1] Bhaskar's *Enlightened Common Sense* (ECS), which he intended to originally title 'Critical Realism in a Nutshell', was published posthumously in 2016, and covers all phases of his thought. But there is another book by Bhaskar that I have not included in this schema. *From East to West: The Odyssey of a Soul,* published in 2000, marked the transitory period between DCR and PMR. Indeed it is extraordinary in both style and content and has an 'experimental' feel to it. It is partly structured as the narrative of a soul's journey through fifteen lives. Bhaskar called this book a work in 'Transcendental Dialectical Critical Realism', but later dropped the term, and made significant changes in the theoretical framework and terminology of his spiritual thinking when he moved on to develop the philosophy of meta-reality.

So we have, to commit some schematism for a moment, CR = BCR (TR+CN+TEC) + DCR + PMR. But this schema is not entirely uncontroversial. In the latest systematic articulations of his thought as a whole, such as his posthumously published *Enlightened Common Sense* (ECS), *The Order of Natural Necessity* (ONN) (which consists of transcriptions of six video-seminars he gave at the Institute of Education [IOE], now part of University College London, recorded and transcripted by Gary Hawke), and the reading seminars he organized at IOE, to which I had the privilege to attend, Bhaskar has insisted on the broad consistency and coherence between these stages of his work, allowing for minor discontinuities and self-critical alterations, changes of direction, and major developments, expecting to be judged by the dialectical, as distinct from analytical, norms of what he calls *developmental consistency*.[2] But this consistency has been disputed by many critical realists. Not all critical realists would subscribe to the principal claims of dialectical critical realism, and even less would accept the main theses of the philosophy of meta-reality (although these later stages seem to find increasingly more proponents). For example, Andrew Collier, the author of the best introductory work to basic critical realism available to date[3], and a 'considerable realist'[4] in his own right, has not been convinced by most arguments in Bhaskar's *Dialectic*[5]; and Craig Reeves, who has published strong sympathetic reinterpretations of Bhaskar's *Dialectic*, has shown virtually no interest in PMR. But there have been cases where previous critics have been 'won over' in time too, so to speak. Mervyn Hartwig's first review of *From East to West* (EW), the transitory work between DCR and PMR, was not positive[6], but he has now become one of the chief exponents of PMR, and has written favourable introductions to new

[2] '(…) the sort of consistency we should seek in a philosophical work which is genuinely innovative = transformative is not of the static, formal-logical sort. It is rather developmental consistency: the sort of consistency shown in nature when a tadpole turns into a frog or an acorn into an oak; or the sort shown within science by different but connected theories in an ongoing research programme.' (PON, Postscript, p.186.)

[3] See his *Critical Realism: An Introduction to Roy Bhaskar's Philosophy.*

[4] The title of Bhaskar's tribute article for Collier, part of the *festschrift, Defending Objectivity,* Routledge 2004.

[5] Andrew Collier and Gideon Calder, "Philosophy and Politics," *Journal of Critical Realism* 7, no. 2 (2008): 276–96.

[6] Mervyn Hartwig, "New Left, New Age, New Paradigm? Roy Bhaskar's From East to West," *Journal for the Theory of Social Behaviour* 31, no. 2 (2001): 139–65.

editions of all PMR books *and* EW; and Alan Norrie, who in 2003 had authored a chapter with Nick Hostettler with the title 'Are critical realist ethics foundationalist?', answering the question partly affirmatively and rejecting DCR's 'ethical orientation', has later in 2010 published the best introduction to dialectical critical realism available so far[7], with a lucid exegesis and comprehensive defence of Bhaskar's *Dialectic* and *Plato Etc.,* including their ethics. I am a critical realist of the kind that mostly agrees with Bhaskar on the overall continuity, or perhaps rather, the absence of irreconcilable discontinuities in his work. But it must be said that Bhaskar does occasionally exaggerate this continuity. In this thesis I will be dealing mostly with dialectical critical realism, but will also cover a lot of material from the earlier works constituting basic critical realism. The philosophy of meta-reality, although it is of great personal interest to me both spiritually and intellectually, and a promising ground for a radical expansion and deepening of DCR ethics, will mostly lie out of the scope of my research.

Basic Critical Realism and the Concept of Transcendentality

The two works that 'originated' critical realism were Bhaskar's *A Realist Theory of Science* (RTS, first published in 1975) which deals with issues in philosophy of natural science, with especially physics and chemistry held in mind, and *The Possibility of Naturalism* (PON, first published in 1979), which deals with issues in the philosophy of human sciences, of which Freudian psychology and Marxian sociology were clearly considered to be paradigm cases. But of course origins themselves have origins. When Bhaskar was a doctoral student at Oxford,[8] his supervisor was the eminent philosopher of science Rom Harré, who had by then already produced important works in

[7] Alan Norrie, *Dialectic and Difference: Dialectical Critical Realism and the Grounds of Justice*, Ontological Investigations (London; New York: Routledge, 2010).

[8] He did not get the 'DPhil' degree, as they are traditionally named in Oxford, albeit he submitted a completed thesis (for his account of what actually transpired, see FCR, ch.2). Thanks to the diligent efforts of Mervyn Hartwig to bring to light as much of the Bhaskarian corpus as possible, this work got published in 2018 by Routledge, nearly fifty years after its was written, with the title *Empiricism and the Metatheory of the Social Sciences*.

scientific realism, especially on the history of science, the nature of causation and explanation, and scientific methodology. Harré's realism, especially his understanding of 'causal powers'[9] was to be a lasting influence on Bhaskar's work.

The 'transcendental realist' work, RTS, was written in a period when post-positivist sociology of natural science had made progress, and the ideas of Thomas Kuhn, Paul Feyerabend, Imre Lakatos and Karl Popper were lively topics of academic discussion. In this intellectual background, steeped in the history of science, analytical philosophy (which was dominant in Oxford at the time of Bhaskar's education there), critiques of positivism and Marxist materialist (as well as social political) thought, Bhaskar pulled off a *tour de force* synthesis of contemporary scientific realism into a coherent constellation of concepts and ideas.

For Bhaskar, positivism was still alive and kicking in latent forms, especially through problems arising from a failure to break away from the paradigm of causality developed by the Scottish empiricist David Hume (1711-1776), or from insufficiencies in the ontologies presupposed by theories that are inadvertently indebted to this paradigm. Hume believed that the idea of causality is based on constant conjunctions of events, and the purported link between them, that is, the connection of natural necessity between the events, was nowhere to be found. It is just the regularity of similar occurrences in nature, and the habit of associating them in the minds of onlookers, that we have been calling causes. Of course, in the contemporary philosophical environment of the time of Bhaskar's writing basic CR texts, Humean understanding of causality was rarely defended directly and in such terms, but what Bhaskar tried to demonstrate was that some of the problems that philosophers of science were dealing with (for example, the problem of induction[10] and

[9] For the culmination of Harré's realist work, see the later published Harré and Madden, *Causal Powers* (1975), which went on to become a classic.

[10] Induction is a mode of inference in which experiences of the past are alluded to for warranting future expectations. For example, claiming that the sun will rise tomorrow morning on the basis that it always did so in the past is a form of inductive reasoning. For Hume, it is question-begging to refer to experience to

Hempel's paradox) were still muddled with it. Bhaskar suggested that in order to be able to account for natural science, and especially experimental scientific activity, we have to go deeper than an ontology of events (regular occurrences in nature, constantly conjoined) and experiences (our habit of associating them), to an ontology of things, structures and possibilities. So he distinguished three domains: the domain of the real, which encompasses possibilities, things, structures, generative mechanisms, powers, liabilities, dispositions and properties (not necessarily excluding each other); from the domain of the actual, which is where possibilities are actualised and powers exercised, through which events are happening; and the domain of the empirical, where some of these are experienced by human beings through perception. There are important distinctions between (a) the real (incorporating the *possible*), (b) the actual, and (c) the empirical; (a) things and their structures, (b) events and (c) experiences; powers unexercised, exercised but unactualized, actualised unperceived and actualised perceived. What makes these ontological distinctions relevant for philosophy of *science* particularly is that Bhaskar argues that the true objects of scientific inquiries are not events, as presupposed by Hume's theory of causality, but structures and generative mechanisms of things. Only in such a depth-ontology do the need, relevance, non-exhaustive role and epistemic fertility of experiments in natural science make sense. This ontology is a *depth*-ontology because these differentiated domains (the real, actual, empirical; things and structures, events, and experiences) are *tiered*, that is, organized by causal priority and existential dependence. In an ontology where causation is understood only in terms of the conjunction of events, or rather, reduced to event regularity, it is not possible to situate natural hierarchies and structurally asymmetrical relations, with which the universe is rife. And this is the only way experiments can make sense because in experiments scientists, in a social *effort*, artificially produce (in a reproducible way) events to obtain a regularity, which would not obtain by itself in nature without the experimental setup and work. In the flat ontology of Hume there should be no need for

show that a regularity will keep holding in the future as it did in the past: it would be circular to try to justify induction by inductive methods. So we have the problem of having rational grounds for supposing that the course of nature will not fundamentally change tomorrow morning, which undermines the reliability of inductive inferences.

experiments, because causal relations just *are* understood in terms of regularities. And moving one step further, once we needed them, experimentation would just be enough for science, which patently is not the case, since there is a lot of hypothesis-building and theory-making before, during and after the experiments.

The Critical Realist Way of Doing Philosophy

But what is transcendental about transcendental realism? Here it is important to distinguish between the terms 'transcendent' and 'transcendental'. The first refers to an 'outside', a surpassing of worldly limits, sometimes associated with the notion of an absolute, or God, and in the context of philosophy of science, usually means, 'above', 'beyond', 'after/before' or simply 'independent' of (the laws of) nature. Transcendence is usually contrasted with immanence. 'Transcendental', on the other hand, is a term Bhaskar borrows from Kant, who put the concept to a technical use in the complex architectonic of his *Critique of Pure Reason*, while also distinguishing it from 'transcendent'. In Kant's and Bhaskar's usage, if a concept or idea is deduced transcendentally, this means it has been inferred from the fact that its experience has been possible, such that the concept or idea (or their reference) has been established as a condition of the possibility of an experience, or experience as such. It is, in a sense, a way of getting 'out of' one's head, and out of Cartesian solipsistic scepticism (hence the fact that it's a derivation of 'transcendent'). In a transcendental inquiry, one asks, 'what must be the case for it to be possible that this feature of my experience exists?' Kant used this in a narrowly individual empirical experiential context, while Bhaskar uses it a lot more loosely to refer to social practices (which, nevertheless, must be a part of some experience). The form such inquiries take in transcendental realism is, 'how must the world be structured so that this social activity as it is experienced and conducted by agents is possible, prevalent and successful?', and this is applied to a particular social activity whose possibility, prevalence, and success are nearly impossible to dispute: experimental natural science, and chiefly physics and chemistry.

It is important to note here that science is a *practice*, and transcendental inquiry is an analysis of the presuppositions and conditions of possibility of a practice, conceptualised in experience in one way or the other. This experience can happen through engaging directly in that activity (doing science), observing it (say, studying it as a sociologist of science), or more indirectly, through simply connecting to the internet or riding on a bus (using technology developed in virtue of scientific discoveries). The practice chosen by the philosopher to serve as the starting position of such inquiries can be different from science, so transcendental analysis is in principle open to many different avenues. What I want to emphasize here is that Bhaskar's philosophical method proceeds from 'generally recognized social activities.'[11] There are many themes that this way of doing philosophy ties into. One is (1) this-worldliness. 'Philosophy does not exist apart from the sciences and other social practices (and arguably vice versa)'.[12] It is not isolated from life (even less so from social life), cannot survive in a vacuum, is not confined to the second stomachs of ruminant philosophers who enjoy idle mental gymnastics and solving puzzles. On the contrary, philosophy springs from what we do in this world, and in turn helps us examine and transform what we do *and* the world.

Connected to this is (2) the primacy of practice, a heuristic principle cognate to the practical materialism of Marxism, ascribing a greater socially and psychologically transformative and constitutive role to practice over theory, exemplified by Marx's famous eleventh thesis,[13] and a

[11] '[T]he possibility is bound to arise of posing for social practices other than science transcendental questions of the form "what must be the case for φ to be possible?" where "φ" denotes some characteristic activity as conceptualised in experience. The conclusion of the argument would be a statement of the conditions of possibility of the particular social activity concerned.' (RTS, p.253); '[Philosophy] does not consider a world apart from that of the various sciences. Rather it considers just that world, but from the standpoint of what can be established about it by a priori argument, where it takes as its premises generally recognized activities as conceptualized in experience.' (PON, p.7).

[12] DPF, p.100

[13] 'The philosophers have only interpreted the world, in various ways; the point, however, is to change it.' Robert C. Tucker, ed., *The Marx-Engels Reader*, 2nd ed. (New York: Norton, 1978), 145.

greater explanatory role of practice over theory than vice versa, exemplified by the base-superstructure model, suggesting that dominant ideologies are shaped to a significant extent by material relations with nature and among individuals.[14] The principle also has more substantive and specific applications in critical realism. Margaret Archer, an eminent critical realist (known especially for her work on relations between structure and agency), in her analysis of subject formation, ascribes a key role to practice in the development of human agents.[15] It could be argued also that the primacy of practice can be useful as an overall heuristic for learning, since practice, which, within an educational context, usually takes the form of exercise and application, seems to be the only way to make knowledge 'one's own', or in Gilbert Ryle's terms, to transition from knowledge-that to knowledge-how. The later emphasis in critical realist pedagogy has shifted towards notions of the unfolding of the potentials of the learner and transformation of her existing capacities (powers to develop an ability to do something) into capabilities (powers to do things). The genealogy of this approach can be traced back to the ancient Greek and distinctively Aristotelian understanding of virtues, which are cultivated by the habitual *exercise* of virtuous deeds. Of course this is not to deny that theory, knowledge-that or explicit knowledge (Polanyi) plays an indispensable role in learning. [16]

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[14] 'The ideas of the ruling class are in every epoch the ruling ideas: i.e., the class which is the ruling material force of society, is at the same time its ruling intellectual force. The class which has the means of material production at its disposal, has control at the same time over the means of mental production (…) The ruling ideas are nothing more than the ideal expression of the dominant material relationships, the dominant material relationships grasped as ideas.' 'The German Ideology' in Tucker, *The Marx-Engels Reader*, 172.

[15] 'To assert the primacy of practice is a refusal to accord primacy to language, and this is what is maintained in relation to the emergence of selfconsciousness. (…) The primacy of practice refers both to its logical and substantive priority in human development. This is not simply a matter of it coming before anything else, though temporally it does just that; it is also a question of viewing language itself as a practical activity, which means taking seriously that our words are quite literally deeds, and ones which do not enjoy hegemony over our other doings in the emergence of our sense of self.' Margaret Archer, *Being Human: The Problem of Agency*, section 4 (Cambridge (UK); New York: Cambridge University Press, 2004).

[16] For further CR discussion of these concepts, see a collection of interviews on education with Bhaskar; David Scott and Roy Bhaskar, *A Theory of Education* (Cham, Heidelberg, New York, Dordrecht, and London: Springer, 2015); Roy Bhaskar's entry on "Tacit Knowledge" in *Dictionary of the History of Science*, ed. William F. Bynum, E. Janet Browne, and Roy Porter (London: Macmillan Education UK, 1981); and Andrew Collier's *In Defence of Objectivity*: *On Realism, Existentialism and Politics* (London and New York: Routledge, 2004), sec. 'The Objectivity of everyday knowledge', 210–19.

The more abstract methodological significance of the primacy of practice in critical realism lies in that transcendental operations start with an activity, not a speculative proposition. Scientific experiments act as a stepping stone for Bhaskar's early philosophy to move forward. Indeed, I would argue that there is a deep-seated quasi-pragmatism in critical realist metaphilosophy, a pragmatism in the mould of the early stages of the development of pragmatist thought we find in Dewey and Peirce. This emphasized the relevance of, and the generative role played by, social practices necessitated by nature and practical needs and interests of human beings as particular types of creatures in the formation of ideational systems, including the reflective order for evaluating ideas, that is, metacriteria for epistemological judgment. But this is only a *quasi*-pragmatism because, if pragmatism were to be reduced to a theory of truth, and the poles of the discussion put roughly, critical realism would resolutely stay on the 'it works because it is true' side, sitting opposite of the 'it is true because it works' side. What CR should grant to pragmatism is the methodological observation that philosophy ultimately has to be grounded in non-philosophical activities and practices of human beings, and I would argue that this is the only rational way to respond to the sceptic's attacks. Philosophy is done with *a priori* arguments, but the premises of the arguments ultimately spring from concrete practices that are social activities, and the more such activities are indispensable for social life, the more socially binding the philosophical arguments developed are going to be.

This ties into (3) the principle, perhaps even the supreme one, of theory-practice consistency. If we accept that necessity to act on some level is part of the human condition (an idea Bhaskar conceptualizes as 'axiological necessity', which I will discuss in detail later), even the radical sceptic would eventually have to act, and if non-scepticism is true, they would have to contradict themselves, typically due to the inconsistencies between the very act of philosophising (putting forth the sceptic argument) and the philosophy they do (the arguments themselves). Critical realism

puts a lot of weight on the principle of theory-practice consistency, which is sometimes discussed in term of 'seriousness', a notion borrowed from Hegel. In order to be 'serious', a philosophy must be able to 'walk its talk', a phrase Bhaskar uses quite often, and indeed in his later works Bhaskar was very keen to characterize critical realism by the trait of seriousness (for example, in his introductions in ECS[17], ONN[18] and *Engaging with the World*[19]). This has been analysed in CR literature also in terms of 'performative contradiction'.

It can be asked, 'if philosophy has to proceed from generally recognized social activities, how can a philosophical critique of those activities be possible? How can we critique what passes as science?' The primacy of practice does not imply there is no room for a philosophical critique of popular social practices, but the critique would itself have to spring from another level, or set, of social activities, and it would take the form of pointing out discrepancies between the presuppositions of the two levels or sets of activities; one acting as the fulcrum, and the other as the target, philosophy being the lever. Thus in principle it is possible to criticize positivistic trends in psychology such as behaviourism by reference to *the way* the likes of Copernicus, Galileo, Newton, Darwin, Einstein, Marx and Freud did science. This is the only way to do (4) immanent, as opposed to transcendent, critique; the premises of the critique must be binding the adversary, and the only way to accomplish that is to start from practices in which the adversary is already actually engaging, or from premises they explicitly hold or tacitly presuppose. Of course, in principle, if you deny the reality, relevance, intelligibility or reliability of the activity, such that, for example, you deny the accomplishments of natural science, you will not be bound by the arguments developed.[20] But then another round of dialectic, in the sense of conversation, would start, perhaps from a deeper level of practice, and you would at some point have to step into a common ground –what we could also call a dialectical

[17] ECS, p.2.
[18] ONN, p.22.
[19] Roy Bhaskar, "Prolegomenon: The Consequences of the Revindication of Philosophical Ontology for Philosophy and Social Theory," in *Engaging with the World: Agencies, Institutions, Historical Formations (Ontological Explorations)*, ed. Margaret Archer and Andrea Maccarini (London: Routledge, 2013), 11–21.
[20] FCR, p.58.

ground– with the inquirer. Once you reach an agreement, then the analysis of the presuppositions of that position would carry the process forward. This is what Socrates masterfully accomplished in his dialogues with the people of Athens, including peevish adversaries. Transcendental argument, launching from social practices with a sufficient degree of commonality, and immanent critique, beginning from the premises shared by adversaries, give us another feature of critical realist metaphilosophy, its dialogical character, or (4) dialecticity in the sense of the term in ancient Greek philosophy. I would argue that this dialecticity, combined with the primacy of practice, this-worldliness, and the principle of seriousness, places it within the Socratic tradition of philosophical practice, infusing an *ad hominem* quality,[21] that is, addressing the interlocutors directly and hence immediately injecting a *moral* stake into philosophical engagements.

Of course we now know that natural necessity dictates what forms of practices are possible, and any immanent critique is therefore enclosed by an appreciation of ontological limits, but we can come to realise this only after rounds of ontological (scientific) and metaphysical (philosophical) inquiries, as there is no immanent way of taking even natural necessity for granted, without recourse to any transcendent source or dogma. It is crucial here to note that once something is grounded (that is, established by adequate reasons) retroductively in science (that is, by way of proceeding from manifest phenomena to underlying causes by inferences to hypothesized explanations) or transcendentally in philosophy (that is, by asking, what the case must be or how the world must be structured in order for some feature of a generally recognized social activity to be possible), it is entirely legitimate to stipulate the relative independence of 'that something' from the retroductive or transcendental procedure itself. In science this is basic scientific realism, and in philosophy, Bhaskar calls this 'transcendental detachment', and it is what differentiates transcendental *realism* from the transcendental idealism of Kant.

[21] SRHE, p.10.

But there *is* a limit to transcendental inquiries and immanent critique, which prompts me to talk a bit more about the deep-seated quasi-pragmatism of CR. I use 'deep-seated' here not in the sense of being essential for and crucially constitutive of it, but rather in the sense of being buried somewhere away. I realize this is a mildly controversial claim. In his transcendental deductions, Bhaskar normally restricts himself to refer only to the conditions of 'possibility' and 'intelligibility' of (experimental natural) science, and does not elucidate why it is science, and not, say, witchcraft or astrology that we inquire into the conditions of possibility of, other than by evoking his criteria of immanent critique, such that experiments were almost ubiquitously taken seriously in the erstwhile philosophical context he wanted to criticize, and that is why he built his philosophy upon that. I think we should add to these concepts (possibility and intelligibility), 'rationality' (in the sense of accepting that it is rational to engage in and rely on this activity) and 'success'. There is surely an essential role played by the success of modern science, which makes it rational for scientists to engage in and non-scientists to rely on it, and this must be among the reasons not only the major figures in the erstwhile philosophical context of Bhaskar, but also Bhaskar himself takes science seriously and proceeds by taking its initial premises for granted. These are some bullets to bite because their *prima facie* affinity with conventionalism and pragmatism are hard to deny. But CR could then qualify the terms of the previous crude statement I made into 'it is not that it is true because it works, but that we know that it is true (can fallibly give reasons for believing it to be an adequate description of the world and rely on technologies informed by it), because, ultimately, it works; but it only works, to the extent that it does, because it is true, to the extent that it is'. Here it is necessary to allow for the partiality of knowledge (contrary to the idea that one can know either everything or nothing) and degrees of truth (contrary to the idea that the truth of statements is a matter of an absolute binary –that a theory is either completely true or completely false), and to distinguish 'reasons for knowing something to be true' from 'reasons for something to be true'. I think this *quasi*-pragmatism is what Bhaskar in a short and almost hidden passage in SRHE alludes

to, without mentioning any link to pragmatism, when he refers to the 'Big Ditch Argument' espoused by Geller:

> 'Moreover the philosopher will have to draw upon this experience in appraising the weight to be placed on arguments from science as against arguments from other historically materialised practices (magic, religion, etc.) where the activities and/or their presuppositions are incompatible. Clearly at this point we appear to have reached an immanent barrier to immanent critique. In the final resort this is indeed so; and there is no alternative but to openly take one's stand with science. However, it would be impossible, or at any rate unreasonable, to deny the historical significance of science (and a fortiori of results based on its analysis), especially in view of the considerations that cluster around what has come to be known as the 'Big Ditch Argument', and in particular the fact that almost everywhere, within the span of a generation or two, agents come to accept modern natural science in the Galilean style as superior in its explanatory power to its pre-modern and/or non-scientific rivals and to prefer—by and large, for better or worse—natural-science based technologies.'[22]

The 'Big Ditch' is the idea put forth by Ernest Geller that there has been a 'great discontinuity' in the history of humankind, forged by the wide social embracement of a particular form of knowledge that 'surpasses' other forms.[23] That this idea is employed in an argument for the 'historical significance of science' (by Bhaskar), which lies at the 'immanent barrier to immanent critique', indicates that although it might be the conditions of 'possibility' and 'intelligibility' of science from which transcendental inquiries *formally* take their cue, it is the general recognition (which is noted by Bhaskar), rationality and practical achievement of science that gives these analyses their intellectual weight and critical bite in the dialectic of philosophy. Rationality (for astrology-based fortune-telling too is possible, intelligible and generally recognized) and practical achievement (for surely this is where science would excel over astrology-based fortune-telling) of science should therefore be appended, if not into the formal methodology of transcendental analysis, then into the *ratio* and the polemical utility of the effort undertaken by the analyst; and the character of this immanent barrier should be recognized, in literally the last analysis, as a *practical* one. This does not mean transcendental inquiries are invariably otiose unless the practices and social activities they

[22] SRHE, p.13.
[23] Ernest Gellner, *Postmodernism, Reason and Religion* (London and New York: Routledge, 1992), 50.

turn towards are ubiquitous, reasonable and successful. On the contrary, it could be a worthwhile exercise to analyse the ontological presuppositions of, say, an anti-vaccination, flat-earth or climate change denying stance and reveal the *aporias*, paradoxes and contradictions that arise when they are held together with the ontological presuppositions of the reliance placed, presumably by the same people carrying those stances, upon, say, self-propelling road vehicles powered by internal combustion, navigation tools based on a Global Positional System technology or weather forecasts (except in London, UK).

An Overview of the thesis

In chapter one of this thesis, I present basic critical realism's ontology in terms of an anti-anthropism. A discussion of the scientific realism of CR's philosophy of natural science provides us with the essential conceptual arsenal, followed by an analysis of the specificity of social science, using Marxist social theory as a paradigm case for demonstrating the latter's critical and explanatory potential. In the second chapter I carry this theme of anti-anthropism into Platonic anti-relativism and Aristotelian anthropology. I argue that there is no conflict between anthropology and an anti-anthropist philosophical perspective, and that anthropology is ubiquitous in axiological discourse. Chapter three is a general introduction to Bhaskar's dialectical philosophy, but one that is (unlike Bhaskar's work itself) explicitly embedded into an ethical context. Chapter four focuses on the MELD schema of Bhaskar's *Dialectic,* and ends with a detailed exegesis of the deployment of the concept of axiology by Bhaskar. Chapter five dives into dialectic proper, where I give an account of Bhaskar's critique of Hegel, and how absences can get the dialectical engine running by transitioning into contradictions and incompleteness within a totality. This lays the conceptual groundwork for the concluding chapter six, where I show how *Dialectic* delivers a dialectical sublation of pre-dialectical critical realist ethics, make the case for a strong affinity between DCR and virtue theory, and finally draw a preliminary sketch for a critical realist critique of Kantian

deontology and utilitarian consequentialism while suggesting some ways in which DCR might help resolve some issues in virtue theory.

Chapter 1: An Anti-Anthropist Metaphysics

Anthropism, Anthropocentrism and Anthropomorphism

Anthropism is a term coined by Bhaskar to refer to anthropocentrism and anthropomorphism, both considered to be sources of major philosophical problems in various and sometimes disguised forms, comprising the basis of complicity for seemingly opposite positions such as rationalism and empiricism.[24] Thus, it is also named the anthropic *fallacy* (the exegesis of being in terms of human being[25]), and is characteristic of irrealisms. It categorically embraces both the epistemic fallacy (the exegesis of being in terms of our knowledge of being) and the ontic fallacy (whereby knowledge is presupposed to be directly determined by being, as a mirror image replicates reality), and ego-centrism (e.g. Cartesian solipsism). But the term anthropism is not mere eclecticism, assembling two whole conceptual items into one. Although it is important to maintain the distinction between anthropocentrism, situating human beings at the centre of the cosmos or considering them as the telos of its history, and anthropomorphism, the outstretching and illicit penetration of human attributes into reality, it is just as important to see them as intermingled and difficult to separate from each other as in a topographical distantiation. The justification of the neologism 'anthropism' is perhaps the intention to capture this entanglement, to emphasize that one can be seen under the aspect of the other. Still, anthropocentrism, which is characterized by the scientific realist Mario Bunge as 'the most primitive of worldviews',[26] seems to be the more foundational, original concept, and anthropomorphism the derivative one, as the latter can be identified as the objectification of the former. Take the example of the two different paths one can trace from the thesis of Protagoras, 'man is measure of all': One is empirical realism, under which the world is defined by its susceptibility to the perceptive abilities of human beings, and absolute relativism, a form of which

[24] '…being is explicated, in both the conceptual realism of rationalism and the empirical realism of empiricism, in terms of an attribute of human being', (DPF, p.192).
[25] Ibid., p.192.
[26] Mario Bunge, *Matter and Mind: A Philosophical Inquiry*, vol. 287 (Dordrecht, Heidelberg, London, and New York: Springer, 2010), viii.

might entail the absolute denegation of the mind-independent existence of all reality. The former is more explicitly anthropomorphic and anthropocentric, while the latter lacks a concept of ontology altogether, hence its anthropocentrism is explicit but its anthropomorphism is not actualised, as the terrain of reality onto which human traits would be projected is, so to speak, prohibited in advance.

As the anthropic fallacy is characteristic of irrealisms, anti-anthropism is characteristic of realisms. But this is not an idle description of exclusively philosophical positions, it implies a description of science as well. Indeed, the irrealism-realism debate has a lot at stake: the realist would argue that anti-anthropism is necessary for (or characteristic of) knowledge, discourse and emancipatory praxis altogether, or on another set, for *science*, including of course anthropology; *morality*, of which anthropology partly comprises the ontology[27]; and *politics*, which, for Aristotle, is morality extended into the social realm.[28]

The Anti-anthropist Ontology of Scientific Realism

In this section, I will try to map out the terminological and ontological groundwork of critical realism and thematize it around its Copernican, anti-anthropist drive. Scientific realist ontology, which is, by definition, a metaphysics, starts from the observation that there are three features of (natural) scientific activity that are considered epistemically significant (if not essential) by empirical realist philosophies of science, and gets the wheels turning by engaging with them through immanent critique and transcendental arguments. These three features are experimental establishment, knowledge and practical application.[29] The idea here which will be the object of an inquiry into (its) conditions of possibility and intelligibility is, that (most) natural sciences, by

[27] '(…) some anthropology is the condition of any moral discourse at all. As ontology stands to epistemology, so anthropology stands to ethics; indeed one could say that anthropology just is the ontology of ethics. Just as a theory about the nature of the world is implicit in any cognitive claim, a theory about the nature of (wo)men is implicit in any moral one.' (SRHE, p.140).
[28] Aristotle considered his major ethical work, *Nicomachean Ethics*, to be in an organic relationship with his political theory.
[29] SRHE, p.27.

experimentation, yield us knowledge that we can apply in our non-scientific practices. It should be noted though that what makes scientific realism itself possible is not that there has been a certain tradition (empirical realism in this case) which has seized upon these features. On the contrary, it would be very much possible for scientific realism to seize upon these features of a certain human activity (scientific activity in this case) on its own. The method of transcendental argumentation would still have been applied, the only difference would be that it would not at the same time constitute an immanent critique of empirical realism. And more importantly, these features are not brought out only for the sake of a debate with empirical realism. Scientific realism *does*, like empirical realism, seize upon these features of scientific activity.

Bhaskar's analysis starts with some conceptual distinctions, between open and closed systems and between structures and events. Beginning with the first distinction, closure does not necessarily convey spatial connotations such as physical insulation or encapsulation. Instead, it refers to the relative isolation of the generative mechanism (or a complex of generative mechanisms) that are under scientific investigation from epistemically irrelevant ones (for the specific investigation at hand) for the observation of its operation in the absence of countervailing influences. For instance, when conducting a simple experiment to observe the velocities of bodies of equal mass that will be dropped at the same time from the same height, the relative effects of air resistance on the bodies during the fall should be reduced to a minimum, so that the aerodynamic differences caused in part by their shapes would not distort the measurements. It should be clear that in this sense, obtaining an absolute closure is impossible since there will always be a multiplicity of uninvestigated mechanisms at play, but it is still possible to obtain artificially produced constant conjunctions of events or empirical regularities. Thus, a crucial aspect of the concept of closure is the idea that closed systems are systems in which constant conjunctions of events hold (and correspondingly, open systems are ones in which they do not). I think this is one of the areas of tension in the basic ontology of scientific realism. It is about the phenomenon of the plenitude though not prevalence or

ubiquity of regularities and patterns, and frequency though not constancy of conjunction of some events and not others outside experimental conditions. In this sense, in an effort to bend the stick of the Humean empiricist paradigm, the scarcity of quasi-closed systems in nature (formed, of course, not due to intentional isolation of certain mechanisms, but by the contingent primacy of some generative mechanisms over others that operate conjunctionally, fading their intervening effects), and the relative redundancy (or the difficulty of ensuring the relevance) of experiments in social science seems to be overstated.

Especially the rapidly developing science of (mostly U.S. based) social psychology which is heavily suffering from empiricist methodology and consequently from the dominance of behaviourist approaches, seems to be desperately in need of an underlabouring scientific realist philosophy that does not rule out the possibility of experiments altogether, but keeps doors open for the possibility of the relevance of carefully structured experimentation in the social and human sciences, without yielding the same status of essentiality for explanation to it that it enjoys in some (but not all) natural sciences. This would be easier if it could be granted more fully that experiments might be important not only in the confirmation of the reality of hypothesized generative mechanisms, but also in pre-theoretical (yet epistemically significant) implications regarding the potential existence of them, directing the decisions of scientists about where to focus, or whether to focus (i.e. into areas about which the experimental results might or might not suggest it to be worth making other experiments and/or postulating hypotheses and theories.) Such a variety of the roles experiments could play in science is already implicit in the dialectic of the natural sciences laid out in the 3rd chapter of RTS, but the potential connections with that of the social and human sciences is brought out by Lawson. Lawson's work, introducing the concepts of ‘demi-regularities’ (defined as a partial event regularity which *prima facie* indicates the occasional, but less than universal, actualization of a mechanism or tendency, over a definite region of time-space)[30], ‘demi-laws’ (the demi- prefix to

[30] Tony Lawson, *Economic Science Without Experimentation*, ER, p.149.

be understood in both concepts as half-way, false, partial or incomplete)[31] and 'contrastives' (concerned with 'why this rather than that under these conditions?' type of questions)[32] and emphasizing the essential role of their 'relative explanatory power' in both the everyday lives of agents and their directional indications for promising scientific research could be read as an attempt to balance the over-bent stick, acting, as it were, as a loosener for some criteria on epistemic relevance.

Lawson points out the relative sense that the concept of closure needs to be employed, and that closures are not attempts to account for everything that goes on in a system: 'We do not and could not explain the complete causal conditions of any social or other phenomenon. To do so would presumably mean accounting for everything back to the "big bang" and beyond. Rather we aim to identify single sets of causal mechanisms and structures.' [33] This brings us to the second distinction, that of 'between *structures*, generative mechanisms and so forth (which comprise the real bases of causal laws) and the *events* which they –normally, conjuncturally– generate.'[34]

For avoiding any ambiguity regarding concepts that recur frequently (and some of which are sometimes used interchangeably) in scientific realist literature such as events, laws, tendencies, powers, liabilities, generative mechanisms, structures, systems, depth, stratification and differentiation, let me briefly engage in some terminological excavation. Scientific realism regards things typically as *compounds*, which means that a thing is typically a multiplicity of generative mechanisms held together by and related in a *structure*.[35] Furthermore, things typically have *stratified* structures. Strata may refer to different levels of being such as the physical, the chemical,

[31] Ibid., p.179, note 1.
[32] Bhaskar and Lawson, *Introduction: Basic texts and developments*, ER, p.12.
[33] Ibid., p.12.
[34] SRHE, p.27.
[35] Cf. 'Any entity counts as a 'thing' if it possesses sufficient internal complexity, organisation, structure or coherence to count as a unit (or system) or a class (or part) of such units or a complex of relations between or within such units or classes or parts, or if it consists in any earthed function of any of the foregoing' (SRHE, p.218) and 'Everything is structured, and structured differentially' (FCR, p.99).

the biological, and the social etc., but also to different ontological tiers within each level, providing causal grounds for structural explanation such that a manifest property of a certain element might be fallibly known to be determined unilaterally by its atomic constitution, its atomic constitution by its electronic structure, its electronic structure by certain features of its quantum mechanical field, and so on.[36] This comprises a *depth* ontology in the order of unilateral dependence for existence and historical emergence, whereby lower orders supply the higher orders with the framework principles or conditions of possibility, while the higher orders set the boundary conditions for the operation of the lower ones. Structures of things are the ways their internal elements are related to each other, in virtue of which things come to have their causal *powers.* Causal powers are powers to bring about changes in the world. They might be possessed without being exercised, and when exercised in open systems, where multiple generative mechanisms operate at the same time, they are regarded as *tendencies.* Tendencies are the real referents of *law* statements, or, put differently, laws of nature must be analysed as tendencies, which are *transfactually efficacious*, that is, they are active whether the system in which they generate the events is open or closed. This makes it possible to comprehend tendencies as operating both inside and outside the laboratory, and regardless of their materialization or actualization, comprising a *differentiated* ontology. As the result of a multiplicity of tendencies, events in open systems are typically *conjunctures*. Finally, *generative mechanisms* are the powers and tendencies of things, and since things are generative mechanisms due to their structures, generative mechanisms and structures comprise the main *objects* of science. This is the basic framework of scientific realism that holds this constellation of concepts together.

Now that we have at our disposal the basic terminological arsenal and the basic premise, which is, to reiterate, that (most) natural sciences, by experimentation, yield us knowledge that we can apply in our non-scientific (in the sense of not essentially knowledge-seeking and outside the laboratory) practices, and two crucial conceptual distinctions, that of between open and closed systems and

[36] RTS, p.160.

between structures and events, we can finally state how they fit in together in an argument: If the premise is true, then the world must be (1) *differentiated*, that is, it must be understood in *open*-systemic terms, and (2) *stratified*, that is, the difference between the domain of the actual, which is the home of observed, non-observed, observable or non-observable *events*, and the domain of the real or the potential, which is the home of structures and generative mechanisms *as well as* the actual, must be recognized. Most contemporary philosophies of natural science, namely those that subscribe to empirical realism, it is further argued by Bhaskar, agree with the premise but deny the differentiation and stratification it assumes, giving rise to a host of irrealist problems.

Here are the initial steps of the argument in condensed form:

> '(i) constant conjunctions of events are praxis-dependent, but causal laws are not.' (…) '(ii) constant conjunctions are empirical, but causal laws are not.' (…) '(iii) Given that knowledge of constant conjunctions is not in general available, it can hardly be practically indispensable. On the other hand, knowledge of causal laws, understood as specifying the tendencies of mechanisms rather than as licensing the deduction of events, is practically useful.'[37]

The first one is a case for the *practical necessity and epistemic significance of experiments*. It straightforwardly observes that experiments are necessary practical interventions in nature, in that they would be redundant if the constant conjunctions of events that are generated under experimental conditions occurred without the intervention. Moreover, experiments augment our knowledge of nature only to the extent that the knowledge acquired by the help of experimentation is still relevant outside the conditions of insulation of certain generative mechanisms, which entails that the tendencies expressed as law statements must be transfactually efficacious in the complex generation of the constant flux of events in nature, where generative mechanisms are not isolated and operate multiply. The second proposition is making a case for the unsustainability of the *universality of causal laws* without the distinction between structures and events. The 'scarcity of closed systems' and 'prevalence of open systems in nature', or in other words, the open-systemic

[37] SRHE, pp.19-21.

character of the world entails that 'the instantiation of the antecedent of a lawish statement is by definition not invariably accompanied by the realisation of the consequent' outside the laboratory.[38] Therefore, if constant conjunctions of events are necessary for the ascription of laws, as the empirical realist claims, we would have to drop the claim for their universality. Once it is accepted that the objects of scientific knowledge are not events but structures, and that laws identified by science must be analysed as tendencies that things have in virtue of their structure, the problem disappears, such that the universality is consistently sustained in their transfactual efficacy in open systems, since laws defined as such can be exercised unactualized (unrealized or not materialized). For the ascription of a law to gravitation, physical bodies do not need to keep moving towards each other until their centres of mass collide (the tendency is unactualized), but they are attracted nevertheless (the tendency is exercised). Collier gives another example: 'oaks tend to grow tall, but not in Beddgelert Forest because of the wet soil; yet their tendency to grow tall is not without effects in Beddgelert Forest - they do get taller than the gorse bushes, and many of them do fall over.'[39] The third proposition aims to defend the possibility of scientifically informed activity. If the objects of science are events, not structures, and laws can be ascribed only in cases of constant conjunctions of events, not tendencies (like the empirical realist contends), then no action in open systems can be scientifically justified, since any interference to the chain of constant conjunctions would have to defy the laws of nature conceived as such, and these laws, if the possibility of action (constituting a break in the chain) is to be accommodated, could be analysed only as counterfactuals, describing the states of affairs which would have transpired if the intervention had not taken place, thus giving no basis for the action. In other words, unless the world is admitted to be open (i.e. constituted by a multiplicity of generative mechanisms operating together to generate events) and deep (understanding the objects of science as structures, not events), either the

[38] Ibid., p.19.
[39] Andrew Collier, *Critical Realism: An Introduction to Roy Bhaskar's Philosophy* (London and New York: Verso, 1994), 63.

possibility of action must be denied, or actions would routinely undermine the laws of nature, inhibiting any scientific explanation of and justification for them.

To summarize Bhaskar's argument, the problems empirical realism faces when aspiring to consistently hold on to the three features of scientific activity listed above as experimental establishment, knowledge and practical application, can be

> '...rationally resolved in the recognition that constant conjunctions, but not laws, are activity dependent, empirical and only locally or sporadically applicable. Laws are analysed as the tendencies of mechanisms which may be possessed unexercised, exercised unrealised and realised undetected (or unperceived) by science; and the satisfaction of the [ceteris paribus] clause is treated as a condition for the empirical identification or (dis)confirmation and the event-predictive or instrumental use of law-like knowledge in effectively closed systems (viz. where only a single mechanism or complex of mechanisms is operating), but not for the causal efficacy of laws. A sequence A.B is necessary if and only if there is natural mechanism M such that when stimulated or released by A, B tends to be produced; (i)–(iii) presuppose that such mechanisms exist and act, as the intransitive objects of enquiry, independently of their identification, knowledge and use by science; and it is in their transfactual activity … that the real ground for our attributions of natural necessity, and a fortiori for the 'surplus-element' in the analysis of laws, lies.'[40]

Up to this point, the analysis was conducted to demonstrate that the analysis of laws as dependent upon regularities and patterns of events, or of the domain of the real (possibilities, powers, generative mechanisms, structures), in terms of the actual (events), was indeed an illicit reduction, forcing those who commit this actualist fallacy to abandon the celebrated features of science such as experimentation, knowledge or practical application. However, this is not the whole argument of scientific realism for the depth and openness of the world. There are two further crucial observations made about scientific activity. The fourth is the occurrence of scientific change and development, and the fifth is the need for scientific education.[41] These last two observations are deployed to challenge the reduction of the domain of the actual to the domain of the empirical. The form of the argument is again transcendental: The categorical distinction between events and

[40] SRHE, pp.22-23.
[41] SRHE, pp.44-47.

experiences is one of the conditions of the possibility of scientific change (and development) and the intelligibility of the requirement for systematic scientific training. This might be elaborated with an example as follows: If the stars and planets to which both the geocentric and heliocentric models of the cosmos refer to as 'the sun' and 'the earth' are respectively one and the same, while they describe the spatio-temporal relationship between the sun and the earth differently, the objects of our experiences, which include events, must be categorically different from our experiences of them, and only if such a categorical difference is accepted thus it makes sense to claim that the theories of the cosmos have changed and developed from the time of Ptolemy to Copernicus (otherwise, *inter alia*, they could not be considered to be about the same objects.)[42]

The 'Copernican Revolution' and Critical Realism

Now let us try to look again at the issue of anti-anthropism from the point of view of critical realism's critique of a great modern philosopher, Immanuel Kant. In critical realist literature, there are at least two references to a claim ascribed to Kant, namely that he has carried out the 'Copernican revolution' in philosophy. Mervyn Hartwig notes in his introduction to Bhaskar's *A Realist Theory of Science* (RTS from now on), that 'Kant himself claimed to have effected a Copernican revolution in philosophy, but the hallmark of Copernicus's accomplishment is the decentring of humanity from the cosmos. Kant's revolution was in effect anti-Copernican.' Similarly, Christopher Norris, in his entry on 'Transcendental Realism', in Hartwig's *Dictionary of Critical Realism,* refers to a '"Copernican revolution" that Kant claimed to have brought about in epistemology and philosophy of mind.'[43] It should be noted that these two examples from critical realism are by no means alone in such an ascription, as it has been traditionally replicated in secondary Kantian literature in attempts to thematize his central point of criticism of classical empiricism in his *Critique of Pure Reason*. Bhaskar, although he speaks of the 'Copernican

[42] Cf. RTS, pp.21-22.
[43] Christopher Norris, "Transcendental Realism," in *Dictionary of Critical Realism,* ed. Mervyn Hartwig (London and New York: Routledge, 2007), 475.

revolution' as well, ascribes neither the concept nor the claim to have achieved it, to Kant. Although Kant has not used the exact phrase 'Copernican revolution', he does refer to a 'revolution' in the recent developments of mathematics and physics, mentioning Thales (rather ambiguously), Galileo, Torricelli and Stahl, and the 'first thoughts'[44] and 'hypothesis'[45] of Copernicus, indicating his critique of metaphysics has proceeded similarly:

> 'Up to now it has been assumed that all our cognition must conform to the objects; but all attempts to find out something about them a priori through concepts that would extend our cognition have, on this presupposition, come to nothing. Hence let us once try whether we do not get farther with the problems of metaphysics by assuming that the objects a must conform to our cognition, which would agree better with the requested possibility of an a priori cognition of them, which is to establish something about objects b before they are given to us. This would be just like the first thoughts of Copernicus, who, when he did not make good progress in the explanation of the celestial motions if he assumed that the entire celestial host revolves around the observer, tried to see if he might not have greater success if he made the observer revolve and left the stars at rest. Now in metaphysics we can try in a similar way regarding the intuition of objects. If intuition has to conform to the constitution of the objects, then I do not see how we can know anything of them a priori; but if the object (as an objects of the senses) conforms to the constitution of our faculty of intuition, then I can very well represent this possibility to myself. Yet because I cannot stop with these intuitions, if they are to become cognitions, but must refer them as representations to something as their object and determine this object, through them, I can assume either that the concepts through which I bring about this determination also conform to the objects, and then I am once again in the same difficulty about how I could know anything about them a priori, or else I assume that the objects, or what is the same thing, the experience in which alone they can be cognized (as given objects) conforms to those concepts, in which case I immediately see an easier way out of the difficulty (…).' [46]

But this lengthy quotation should make it clear that the transcendental realist (Bhaskar) and transcendental idealist (Kant) approaches to the achievement of Copernicus clash considerably. What incited Kant to inaugurate an 'analogue', a 'similar' 'hypothesis' or a thought experiment, if you like, in epistemology, was Copernicus's insight that the way the movements of the 'spheres' appear to us might have something to do with a feature of our own, namely, *our* movement. This was, in other terms, the acknowledgement of the possibility that the way objects appear to human beings is heavily dependent on the features of the perceiver. Kant seized on this very simple idea as the basis of what he found to be absent in non-transcendental-idealist empiricists, who regarded

[44] Immanuel Kant, *The Critique of Pure Reason* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 110 BXV.
[45] Ibid., p.113.
[46] Ibid., p.110.

knowledge as inscriptions of nature on our minds conceived as empty sheets of paper: the human ingredient in the objects of our knowledge, which is the source of what Bhaskar, borrowing a term from Buchdahl, would come to call the 'surplus element' in knowledge, the element that is 'over and above' what the passive observation of constant conjunctions of events could yield, allowing the scientist to distinguish the necessary from the accidental in nature.[47] This was an important step in challenging the sense-certainty of subjective classical empiricism, in that it invited an interrogation of the limitations, contingencies and the precariousness of our cognitive, perceptive, epistemic capacities and their effects on our inquiries into nature. It was with this Copernican insight, the re-incorporation of facts that were reified by the empiricist that Kant attempted to reject the pole of 'naturalized science' in the 'momentous exchange of anthroporealism', but with the price of a 'humanized nature.'[48] However, Copernicus did not stop with the reflective admission of the efficacy of features belonging to the observer on the observations, and took a step *further*, carrying out the typical task of scientists: investigating what being is like regardless of their investigation. Copernicus produced a theoretical system that would account for the movements of the spheres *regardless* of the movement of the observers, replacing the dominant geocentric astronomy with a heliocentric one, thus removing human beings from the centre of the universe. Critical realism accordingly calls for two Copernican revolutions: 'The first establishing a transitive dimension in which our knowledge is seen to be socially produced, and as such neither an epiphenomenon of nature nor a convention of man. The second establishing an intransitive dimension, based on the reconstitution of a philosophical ontology, in which the world of which, in the social activity of science, knowledge is obtained is seen to be in general quite independent of man.'[49] Kant, in the spirit of Copernicus, has objected to the type of empiricism that conceives knowledge as an epiphenomenon of nature but has limited his 'analogy' to that first step of the anti-

[47] RTS, p.139.
[48] The anthropo-*morhpist* expansion. Kant conceived space and time to be bestowed upon the 'object' by the human mind.
[49] RTS, p.52.

anthropism inherent in the realism of Copernicus's actual scientific practice, *locating* the human, but failing to *remove* her from the centre.

Copernicus is not alone in operations of epistemological decentring. In fact, major modern developments in both the natural and human sciences are characterized by such operations. Bhaskar locates a fourfold decentering carried out by Copernicus, Darwin, Marx and Freud.[50] On the planetary level, Copernicus removed the earth from the centre of the universe, while on the level of the species Darwin showed that humans were not the result of a universal *telos* imposed upon the earth, but were the products of exactly the same type of highly contingent natural processes that apply in exactly the same way to other living creatures, disclosing common ancestries. On the societal and individual level Marx, by initiating the research programme of historical materialism, removed the intentions and wills of individual subjects from the main artery of the development of history, decentering society and grounding it in material relations with nature, and on the mental level Freud decentered the human psyche by removing consciousness from its all-mighty throne, ruling the mind. Earth is not the centre of the universe, human beings are not at the centre of life, the individual is not the centre of societies nor history, and the Cartesian ego is not the centre of the human psyche.[51]

[50] PON, p.124.

[51] Cf. Freud's own description of this historical process of de-anthropocentricisation: 'In the course of centuries the naïve self-love of men has had to submit to two major blows at the hands of science. The first was when they learnt that our earth was not the centre of the universe but only a tiny fragment of a cosmic system; scarcely imaginable vastness. This is associated in our mind with the name of Copernicus, though something similar had already been asserted by Alexandrian science. The second blow fell when biological research destroyed man's supposedly privileged place in creation and proved his descent from the animal kingdom and his ineradicable animal nature. This revaluation has been accomplished in our own days by Darwin, Wallace and their predecessors, though not without the most violent contemporary opposition. But human megalomania will have suffered its third and most wounding blow from the psychological research of the present time which seeks to prove to the ego that it is not even master in its own house, but must content itself with scanty information of what is going on unconsciously in its mind.' Sigmund Freud, *The Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud. Introductory Lectures on Psycho-Analysis* (Norton & Company, [1916] 1976), 3361.

Anti-anthropism in Social Ontology: Explanation, Critique and the Specificity of Social Science

> *"All the sciences are intrinsically critical and so evaluative. All the sciences make judgements of truth or falsity on beliefs about their object domain. But the human sciences, in virtue of the distinctive feature of their domain, that it includes* inter alia *beliefs about social objects, also make (or at least entail) judgements of truth or falsity on aspects of that domain, in pursuing their explanatory charter."*[52]

When Galileo, Copernicus, Kepler and Newton challenged Aristotelean physics, part of what they were involved with was criticism, in that they showed that the assumed teleology of things was false. Rocks did not have a desire to move where they belong, which just happened to be the centre of the earth. On the contrary, it was in their nature to remain inert unless there is a resultant force acting upon them. Nor did the celestial bodies try to imitate divine perfection by circular movements around the centre of the cosmos, which just happened to be the Earth. On the contrary, the Earth was just another great body of mass moving around some other great body of mass. Moreover, the movements concerned were not even circular to begin with. Put in different terms, but not radically different terms, with everything else being equal, if we want to get to the moon, we ought to get on the Newtonian rocket rather than the Aristotelean one. Similar was Einstein's work with respect to Newtonian physics: Newton's laws were not as universal as they were thought to be, and matters could be quite different when velocities approached the speed of light. It was not some gravitational force that caused the moon to orbit around the earth, but that masses generated curvatures in space-time and this caused nearby moving masses to follow this path.

Let us switch domains and take the work of Freud: On the basis of his theories lies an *objection* to the popular reductions of the psychic to the conscious, and the sexual to the reproductive and/or the genital. And again, Marx's most significant work, *Capital*, aptly subtitled *A Critique of Political*

[52] PIF, p.158.

Economy, consisted of a theoretical effort to demonstrate that it is wrong to believe that the owners of the means of production pay their workers the value of their work. On the contrary, what the workers receive is what is necessary for them to regain their strength to come back to work the next day and work another full shift, and this is categorically different from the value of their work (more technically, it is the labour required to reproduce their labour-power).

A pattern is visible, then, in the history of science: All great scientific developments rest in part on some form of a *critical* assessment of prior developments. However, even if both the theories of Einstein and Marx 'burst like a bolt from the blue, in all civilized countries, while the theories of all of [their] precursors … petered out ineffectually',[53] there exists a profound asymmetry in the history of politics between the movements that take their cue from the Einsteinian criticism of Newtonian physics compared to those taking their cue from the Marxian critique of political economy. It is clear from a common sense point of view that this comparison is unfair, in that the former is a work of natural science and the latter of social science, but this at the same time yields a crucial starting point for establishing the specificity of social science: Due to the distinct subject matter of his field, Einstein *qua* physicist had no chance, and naturally made no attempt, to reveal how our false ideas about the generative mechanisms of nature served to further the endurance of those mechanisms. He, as long as he stayed as a physicist, could provide *explanations* of certain aspects of nature partly through a criticism of our false or inadequate ideas about them, but these could not at the same time be explanations on *why* those false or inadequate ideas became so predominant. For that, he would have to indulge in sociology of science and shift the *object* of his investigations, from natural mechanisms to the relations between them and human beings and among human beings, which he never did. This immediately implies a very basic realism about nature: The objects of his scientific inquiries existed and acted in ways that are independent of our true and false beliefs about

[53] Karl Marx, *Capital*, vol. 3 (London: Penguin, 1991), 97.

them. The properties of matter moving at the speed of light have no regard for our knowledge or false ideas.

With Marx, however, the case is radically different: Our false ideas about social structures *do* have irreducible effects on, and indispensable functions for the existence of the very structures themselves: The durability of the capitalist mode of production partly *depends* on people believing the idea that workers do get the value of their labour in the form of wages, and the complexity of the relations of production renders the value and wage forms evasive. Marx *qua* social scientist, then, *because* he was a social scientist, when working on the structures and mechanisms of the capitalist mode of production, was able to do something more than a mere critique of political economy, he also had an ontological opportunity to provide an *explanation* of its necessity for what it was about. With the natural sciences, explanation is achieved through, among other activities, a criticism of ideas as well, but unlike the social sciences, the criticism of ideas cannot at the same time constitute an explanation of them. We are now coming closer to identifying one of the reasons it is unfair to compare the size of Einsteinian political movements with Marxian ones, all we have to do is to flip the coin: That the criticism of false ideas about the capitalist mode of production can at the same time be an explanation of them, logically implies that now the explanations about the structures of the capitalist mode of production can at the same time be a critique of the structures of the capitalist mode of production themselves if false ideas can be shown to be necessary for the structures in a way that cannot be applied to natural science: since we cannot move from the erstwhile evasiveness of the atomic structures of elements to a critique of them for being, say, 'too damn small'.

This view creates some problems though: 1) If the distinctiveness of *social* things partly lies in their concept-dependent character, how can one remain a realist in the social sciences? Is this not the trademark of idealism? 2) How is this 'flip of the coin' not just a magic trick? Is objectivity, one of

the highest decorations of science, in jeopardy? 3) What does it mean for certain modes of false consciousness to be necessary, and more specifically, how can these modes of false consciousness be explained by reference to social structures and mechanisms? Even more specifically, is this explanation any different from the explanation of the movement of a billiard ball by reference to another billiard ball having antecedently hit it?

A task that this chapter sets for itself will be, in dealing with these questions within the philosophical framework of scientific realism as elaborated by Roy Bhaskar, to consider to what extent Marx's analysis of capitalism can be interpreted as a paradigm case of a depth-explanatory critique, as is implied by Bhaskar:

> "...the critique of a scientific or proto-scientific theory in social science not only carries the trivial implication that one should not go on believing it, but involves an explanation of the reasons why it is believed and a critique of the circumstances which explain this. Marx's critique of political economy is a classic example of this kind. It has the structure of a triple critique. It is a critique of classical, political and vulgar economic theories; of lay beliefs, involving both practical and discursive consciousness, and of the categories and their schema which inform them; and of the structures, chiefly of the capitalist mode of production, underpinning them. … In ideology critique of the sort Marx's *Capital* exemplifies, three sorts of conditions -critical, explanatory and categorial- must be satisfied."[54]

In the more provocative terms of the title of this section, then, my chief problem will be: If 'the textbook doctrine that fact and value, theory and practice belong to different realms creates an artificial barrier between sociology and ethics', and if it is true that 'on the contrary, social theory just is moral philosophy, but as science,'[55] can we read *Capital* under this light?

[54] PIF, p.159.
[55] PIF, p.145.

Critical Naturalism at Work: *Capital,* Historical Materialism and the Ethical Connection

In this section I would like to argue that Marx's work has moral conclusions, but in two ways that might be differentiated. In the first, it is possible to understand Marx's greatest work, *Capital*, as revealing *necessary* relations between social mechanisms and their mystified forms, relations that are specific to the *capitalist mode of production*, which might be initially defined as a mode of production in which commodity production is predominant. In the second, it is possible to understand Marx's *historical materialism* as a research programme that reveals how *capitalist social formations* need ideological (in the negative conception of it) apparatuses that take on the function of veiling the capitalist relations of production for their reproduction. In the first of the aforementioned ways, we are on the terrain of a relatively theoretical-abstract science, while in the second, a relatively applied-concrete one. In the first, we are mainly going to be dealing with production, while in the second, reproduction. In the first, we are going to analyze relations of appearance, while in the second, function.

In the first chapter of *Capital*, Marx makes a distinction between the use-value and exchange value of a commodity, which might be defined as a useful product made for the purpose of exchange.[56] While exchange value is quantitative and defines the ratio of exchange between different commodities, as in, when 1 box of chocolate is exchanged with 3 cups of coffee, the use-value pertains simply to the usefulness of a commodity, its capacity to 'satisfy' a definite 'human need.'[57] The use-value of a cup of coffee lies, for instance, in that a human being drinks it to keep awake at long nights of thesis writing. More importantly, use-value is qualitative, and there is no medium in which it can be compared quantitatively with other use-values. It is not comprehensible to measure the *eating* of a piece of chocolate or the *drinking* of a cup of coffee, and thus, to compare their

[56] Karl Marx, *Capital*, vol. 1 (London: Penguin, 1982), 131.
[57] Ibid., p.124.

quantities, since no such thing exists. Yet, in the market, they come to be exchanged at a relatively stable ratio: *1* box of chocolate for *3* cups of coffee, so there must be something inherent in them both that makes this possible, and this something cannot be their use-value, since they are not commensurable in a way that would yield a relatively stable ratio. What makes chocolate exchangeable with coffee, is, according to Marx, 'precisely their abstraction from their use-values.'[58] It is this very abstraction that bears another crucial distinction between concrete and abstract labour:

> With the disappearance of the useful character of the products of labour, the useful character of the kinds of labour embodied in them also disappears; this in turn entails the disappearance of the different concrete forms of labour. They can no longer be distinguished, but are all together reduced to the same kind of labour, human labour in the abstract.[59]

What makes a *determinate* amount of chocolate exchangeable with a *determinate* amount of coffee, is, then, *the* abstract labour socially necessary to produce them, quantified as, in a bunch of averaging clauses, 'the labour-time required to produce any use-value under the conditions of production normal for a given society and with the average degree of skill and intensity of labour prevalent in that society.'[60] Marx calls this labour the 'substance'[61] of the *value* of commodities and allocates the concept of 'exchange value' to the *form of appearance* which the value of the commodity takes when it is being exchanged with another commodity. This is simply due to the fact that when being exchanged with different commodities, the exchange values will be different (1 box of chocolate might be exchanged with 3 cups of coffee, 50 sheets of paper, 8 British Pounds, etc.), while the abstract socially necessary labour required to produce it will remain constant. This point is crucial. Although the value of a commodity is 'purely social' and abstract, it will *manifest* this inherent social essence only through other commodities as exchange values. What in its essence is a relation between human beings that takes place in the sphere of production, that is, social

[58] Ibid., p.127.
[59] Ibid., p.128.
[60] Ibid., p.129.
[61] Ibid., p.131.

labour, will thus appear as a relation between the natural properties of specific commodities when they are exchanged in the market:

> Whence, then, arises the enigmatic character of the product of labour, as soon as it assumes the form of a commodity? Clearly, it arises from this form itself. The equality of the kinds of human labour takes on a physical form in the equal objectivity of the products of labour as values; the measure of the expenditure of human labour-power by its duration takes on the form of the magnitude of the value of the products of labour; and finally the relationships between the producers, within which the social characteristics of their labours are manifested, take on the form of a social relation between the products of labour.
>
> The mysterious character of the commodity-form consists therefore simply in the fact that the commodity reflects the social characteristics of men's own labour as objective characteristics of the products of labour themselves, as the socio-natural properties of these things.[62]

This *necessary* mystification that Marx calls *commodity fetishism* is what marks his analysis as an example of an explanatory critique.

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[62] Ibid., p.165.

Chapter 2: The Possibility of an Anti-anthropist Philosophical Anthropology: Ancient Greek Themes

Plato and anthropism: Plato's critique of the Protagorian thesis 'man is measure of all' in the *Theaetetus*

Plato's *Theaetetus* features an attempt to define knowledge but reaches no positive conclusions, ending in an *aporia*. In a sense the attempt seems to have been intended to fail from the start: Socrates and his interlocutor, the young and brilliant Theaetetus (who is a real historical figure, a disciple of Socrates and an influential mathematician) take on in sequence two definitions of knowledge, one in terms of sense-perception and one in terms of *doxa*, or mere received opinion, both of which we know in the overall Platonic oeuvre to be differentiated from and fall short of genuine knowledge, *episteme,* achieved via reasoned (dialectical) inquiry into the enduring Forms of things.[63]

The relevance of the dialogue for the context of anthropism is that one of these theses, the one based on sense-perception, is presented in the form of 'Man is the measure of all things: of the things which are, that they are, and of the things which are not, that they are not'. The thesis is ascribed to the first and foremost of the sophists, Protagoras. It is not clear whether the historical Protagoras intended by 'man' to refer to a 'human race' as such, but in the dialogue the thesis seems to have been interpreted mainly as referring to single persons. Nevertheless, firstly, it is easy to extend the argument into a more generalized form, since individualism (of this form) is only a special, more limited case of anthropism, and secondly, Plato's refutation applies to its collectivised form as well. The road to such extensions is readily paved in the dialogue: 'Whatever in any city is

[63] In the famous image of the 'divided line' in the *Republic*, both are located below the most fundamental principles, led by the Form of the Good, by which hypotheses that lie beneath them in the hierarchy could be confirmed or rejected to be true.

regarded as just and admirable is just and admirable, in that city and for so long as that convention maintains itself' (167c)[64]. If the thesis can be generalized to a city, why stop there and not cover the whole human race?

This generalizability is one of the elements that justify the reading of the dialogue as anti-anthropism, because how Plato tackles the issue of defining knowledge as sense-perception is converging it into a form of relativism:

> Theaetetus: It seems to me that a man who knows something perceives what he knows, and the way it appears at present, at any rate, is that knowledge is simply perception.
> (…)
> Socrates: But look here, this is no ordinary account of knowledge you've come out with: it's what Protagoras used to maintain. *He said the very same thing, only he put it in rather a different way*. For he says, you know, that 'Man is the measure of all things: of the things which are, that they are, and of the things which are not, that they are not.' You have read this, of course?
> Theaetetus: Yes, often.
> Socrates: Then you know that he puts it something like this, that as each thing appears to me, so it is for me, and as it appears to you, so it is for you—you and I each being a man?
> Theaetetus: Yes, that is what he says. (152a[65], emphasis added)

This is quite an extraordinary move by Socrates: with putting perception to the fore comes an immediate element of relativism. The basis for the legitimacy of Socrates' swift transition from one definition to the other is his differentiation of appearance and Being. Appearance for Socrates brings in the element of the contingency of 'me' in 'what it appears to *me*'. And if, as he holds, defining knowledge in terms of perception *is* a form of the Protagorean relativism, then his criticism applies, by extension, to empiricism and anthropism in general. How a thing appears to me or you, or by extension, to humans is distinct in various ways from what it really is, its *Logos*. This problem, that appearance is very much dependent on the perceiver, yet that which appears, or what we in our epistemic activity aspire to know is something different, is very similar to what Bhaskar identifies as the 'central paradox of science: that men in their social activity produce knowledge which is a social product much like any other, which is no more independent of its production and

[64] Socrates impersonating Protagoras to reiterate his argument on the request of Theaetetus.
[65] All translations of Plato cited in this section are from the English edition of his collected works prepared by Cooper: Plato, *Complete Works*, ed. John M. Cooper (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing, 1997).

the men who produce it than motor cars, armchairs or books, which has its own craftsmen, technicians, publicists, standards and skills and which is no less subject to change than any other commodity. This is one side of 'knowledge'. The other is that knowledge is 'of' things that are not produced by men at all: the specific gravity of mercury, the process of electrolysis, the mechanism of light propagation. None of these 'objects of knowledge' depend upon human activity. If men ceased to exist sound would continue to travel and heavy bodies fall to the earth in exactly the same way, though *ex hypothesi* there would be no-one to know it.'[66]

The objects of science exist independently of their being investigated, and this is firmly differentiated by Bhaskar from what *is* very much dependent on the social activity of human-scientists. The referents or the objects or the ontology of science are allocated to the *intransitive dimension*, while the activity itself, its (social) mode and means of production lie in the *transitive dimension*. The paradox is in that scientists investigate how things are, independent of their investigation. One looks to see what a thing would be like if no one were looking at it.

Plato too is after more than what yields to the precariousness of our contingent constitution, not what something is for him and Theaetetus, but what something *is* period. We should refrain from pushing the connection too far, Plato's position is far from qualifying as even a proto-critical realism, but there is still an undeniable realism about the objects of epistemic inquiry here because it seems clear that according to Plato, for knowledge to be possible, it must be of something that does not change according to whoever perceives or thinks it, but has independent essential properties of its own.

This implicit call for durability becomes more clear when Socrates converges another thesis with the previous two (that knowledge is perception and that man is the measure of all), his radical (and

[66] RTS, p.11.

perhaps inaccurate) interpretation of the Heraclitean theory of becoming. Socrates seems to believe that the ambiguity of the wind's warmness or coldness that arises from the two theses (i.e. there is no such thing as the wind being cold or warm in itself, it can only be warm for me or you, which means it can be warm for me while being cold for you) is reminiscent of the theory that everything is in ceaseless motion and going through change to the point that nothing *is*, but is in the process of becoming instead, and everything is in a state of constant flux. This thesis naturally is not met with sympathy by Socrates, who believes, to put it in more contemporary terminology, that it denegates the possibility of reference and intelligibility of communication: 'We were most anxious to prove that all things are in motion, in order to make that answer come out correct; but what has really emerged is that, if all things are in motion, every answer, on whatever subject, is equally correct, both "it is thus" and "it is thus" – or if you like "becomes," as we don't want to use any expressions which will bring our friends to a standstill. (…) Well (…) [but] one must not use even the word "thus" for this "thus" would no longer be in motion. The exponents of this theory need to establish some other language (...), they have no words that are consistent with their hypothesis', (*Theaetetus*, 183b)

In the *Cratylus*, Plato's Socrates puts the opposition much more directly: 'Is the being or essence of each of them [the things that *are*] something private for each person, as Protagoras tells us? He says that man is "the measure of all things," and that things are to me as they appear to me, and are to you as they appear to you. Do you agree, or do you believe that things have some fixed being or essence of their own?' (386a).

But Socrates's move from the thesis that knowledge is perception to 'Man is measure of all' is not only relativism in its modern sense. True, Socrates does attempt to refute the latter by forcing it into a position of self-contradiction. In the famous *peritropê*, or 'overturning' critique, Protagoras is pushed back to a wall where he has to admit that according to Socrates, who disagrees with the

thesis that ‘Man is measure of all’, he [Protagoras] was wrong. Since according to Protagoras himself, it is Socrates too who is measure of all (if ‘man’ is indeed the measure of all), if he is to stand by his own thesis, he would have to admit he was wrong.[67]

This seems more like a tactic to expose the untenability of his adversary. It is not only that the truth would be different for some different people that makes the ‘knowledge is perception’ argument problematic. If Protagoras were to proclaim, ‘I, Protagoras of Abdera, and I alone, am the measure of all: Truth is whatever I perceive to be the case’, Socrates would not be content to see that the element of relativity is eliminated. This is why it is important to remember that Socrates has hinted on the generalisability of the argument to humankind, by way of generalising it himself to the population of a city. The problem rather lies in that truth has been defined as not in terms of what things themselves are, but in terms of what things *seem* to be to some contingent entity (which is analytical to the concept of sense-perception). For Plato, it is always the ‘thing itself’ that knowledge aspires to reach, a view for which textual evidence abounds:

From the *Theaetetus*:

> Socrates: But consider what happens, my friend, when he in his turn draws someone to a higher level, and induces him to abandon questions of “My injustice towards you, or yours towards me,” from an examination of justice and injustice themselves.” (175b-c)

From the *Meno*:

> Socrates: …if I were asking you what is nature of bees, and you said that they are many and of all kinds, what would you answer if I asked you … “Do you mean that they are many and varied and different from one another in so far as they are bees? [I would humbly like to suggest another translation of this question: ‘do you mean are they different with regard to *being* bees?’] …
> Meno: I would say they do not differ from one another in *being* bees.
> …

[67] The logical coherence of this self-refutation charge by Socrates is still up for debate. For an interpretation which emphasizes the implications of the *performative* act of getting into a debate with such a thesis (‘man is measure of all’), see Luca Castagnoli, “Self-Refutation and Dialectic in Plato and Aristotle,” in *The Development of Dialectic from Plato to Aristotle*, ed. Fink Leth Jakob (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2012), 27–61. Castagnoli demonstrates that the abstract linguistic-discursive domain is not the only place one should look to find logical contradictions. The (implications of the) practice of engaging in discourse, and the explicit theoretical content of the discourse itself can be inconsistent too. In this sense, he backs Socrates’ self-refutation charge to Protagoras via incorporating the dialectical element that cannot be abstracted from philosophical practice.

> Socrates: (…) Tell me, what is this *very* thing Meno…? (72b-c)
> …
> Meno: I think courage is a virtue, and moderation, wisdom, and munificence, and very many others.
> Socrates: We are having the same trouble again, Meno, though in another way, we have found many virtues while looking for one, but we cannot find the one which covers all the others. (74a)

From the *Symposium*:

> Socrates: [conveying the words of Diotima of Mantinea] …it is not beautiful in this way and ugly that way… but is itself by itself with itself. … [not] to measure beauty by gold or clothing or beautiful boys and youths … but to see the Beautiful itself … absolute, pure, unmixed, not polluted by human flesh or colors or any other great nonsense of mortality (211a-e)

This repeated emphasis implies a very strict distinction, or a large cleft between the ontology of empirical realism which takes the appearances and instances of things as the only objects of knowledge, and the real nature of things themselves in their durable, independent, essential being. In this sense, Socrates' jump from the 'knowledge is perception' thesis to 'man is measure of all' is not incidental or arbitrary, nor is his criticism limited to individualistic relativism. For Plato, the reduction of knowledge to perception is akin to putting human beings in the centre of epistemology, which misses the real objects of investigation.

Aristotle as a philosophical anthropologist: the explicit anthropology of Aristotle's *Nicomachean Ethics*

> Life seems to belong even to plants, but we are seeking what is peculiar to man. Let us exclude, therefore, the life of nutrition and growth. Next there would be a life of perception, but it also seems to be shared even by the horse, the ox, and every animal. There remains, then, an active life of the element that has reason; of this, one part has it in the sense of being obedient to reason, the other in the sense of possessing reason and exercising thought. And, as 'life of the rational element' also has two meanings, we must state that life in the sense of activity is what we mean; for this seems to be the more proper sense of the term.[68]

Aristotle starts his major ethical work, *Nicomachean Ethics* (sometimes NE from now on), by discussing and dismissing what he presents as Platonic arguments for the existence of a

[68] Aristotle, "Nicomachean Ethics," in *The Complete Works of Aristotle*, ed. Jonathan Barnes, (Princeton, N.J: Princeton University Press, 1995), 1098a.

transcendent and singular Idea that is *the* Good itself, and argues for a multiplicity of varieties of good action, based on different ends pertaining to different activities, such as health to medicine, victory to strategy, a house to architecture.[69] The good Aristotle seeks is also ultimate, complete and self-sufficient, 'that which is always desirable in itself and never for the sake of something else'[70], but it is nevertheless immanent, humanly attainable and this-worldly: it does not exist separately and independently of various good practices. After considering wealth, pleasure and honour, he arrives at the conclusion that it can be only happiness or well-being (*eudaimonia*) that fulfils the criteria of being the ultimate, complete and self-sufficient end for human action. He then goes on to substantiate morality with his ideas on hedonism, money-making, fame, friendship, incontinence, cowardice and courage, habituation, city administration, law-making, the upbringing of children, and indeed, the good society and politics. But the pertinent aspect of his ethics to this section, rather than these substantiated theories, lies in the method and justification he offers to reach them.

In order to go beyond the 'platitude' in identifying happiness as the chief good, Aristotle rejoices in a very particular line of argument: he delves into an investigation of the function of human beings[71]. Just like what makes a flute player a good flute player is distinguished by the function, task or work (ergon) of the flute player that is the flute-playing, argues Aristotle, what makes a good human being good might lie in an activity that constitutes its function.[72] Now the task is simply finding out what that function might be. 'Nutrition and growth' and 'perception' are discarded since they are not peculiar to humans, plants can grow and all animals can perceive. The proper function must be

[69] Op. cit., 1097a.
[70] Op. cit., 1097a.
[71] Aristotle's actual reference is unfortunately limited to 'free' and firmly gendered male citizens (i.e. non-slaves). I have nevertheless chosen to stick to the term 'human being' in my account.
[72] Although Aristotle does not lay it out here, this so-called 'function argument' (a later term coined by interpreters) has metaphysical underpinnings in his theory of the 'four causes'. According to this doctrine, every natural kind has formal, material, efficient and final causes (*Physics* 194b–195a). The latter cause, the *telos*, end or purpose of a thing, is definitive of the kind of thing that thing is, so that being a thing of a particular kind involves having a function characteristic of that kind. Human beings are no exception, and this final cause arguably corresponds to 'function' in this discussion in the NE.

specific to humans, and since the most significant *differentia* between human beings and other species is the humans' rational capacities, for Aristotle, 'there remains, [as the only option for comprising the proper function, O.Ö.], then, an active life of the element that has a rational principle'.[73] (1) The function must involve an *activity*, as opposed to his interpretation of Plato's ethics according to which the *possession* of wisdom is enough for the good life, (2) this activity must be an activity of the soul (or with more contemporary terminology, 'mind') and must have a rational principle, (3) it is in the *excellence* of the performance of a capacity that makes an activity a *good* one, just like it is the excellence of the lyre-playing that distinguishes a lyre-player as a good lyre-player. Aristotle then elaborates these ideas and finds the proper function to be a sort of contemplative activity, very much akin to that of a philosopher.

To summarize, Aristotle's way of reasoning is as follows: Human beings, just like other kinds of beings, have certain essential capacities, these capacities must be discovered by analyzing what distinguishes *human* beings from others, and such distinguishing essential features define the *function* (*ergon*) of human beings. The good life for human beings must thus reside in perfecting the fulfilling of this function, which requires the cultivation of the essential capacities that define them as the specific beings that they are. This is explicitly an anthropology, and it is worthy of note that the modern problem of moving from 'Is' to 'Ought' or 'facts' to 'values' never arises for Aristotle. It was natural for him to suppose that the good life must be identified by what kind of beings human beings are, and knowledge of this would yield knowledge about what kind of life human beings should pursue, determining the very subject matter of ethics, and this extends, just like as it does for critical realists, into the context of political life as well as everyday morality.

[73] Op. cit., 1097b-1098a.

The axiological ubiquity of anthropology[74]

'Concrete axiological judgement' (sometimes 'CAJ' from now on) is a term coined by Bhaskar in his theory of explanatory critique. Technically, it is one of the necessary steps in the process of moving from theoretical critique to emancipatory action.[75] But in the sense that I want to deploy the concept, concrete axiological judgements are ubiquitous in moral life and their role is not limited to this technical location in the schema of explanatory critique, or to put it differently, they are not necessarily derived from an explanatory critique (but the reverse is not true, all explanatory critiques do entail CAJs, which include judgements that prescribe inactivity or no action). As Bhaskar himself notes, 'it should be remembered that some, perhaps implicit, CAJ is always present (and so formed) and some action or other is always performed'. This seems to imply that explanatory critiques are not analytical to the concept of CAJs, which allows for the possibility of ill-informed or bad judgements of this type. So they do not have to be conjoined to an explanatory critique to serve as a stepping stone towards intentional (im)moral action. But I do not argue that CAJs are *directly* decisive in all actions. For acts that are partly based on such judgements, there are always going to be other complicated internal and external factors involved as well, which might support or counteract the CAJs, making room for inconsistencies. Besides, some acts are not based on such forms of judgment at all, e.g. in cases of forced action, in some cases of *akrasia*[76], in cases where one's capacity to form a judgement has faltered but she acts nevertheless etc. I only argue

[74] A draft of this section was previously published on the Critical Realism Network blog: Onur Özmen, "Critical Realism and The Art of Gift Giving," *Critical Realism Network* (blog), February 28, 2017, https://criticalrealismnetwork.org/2017/02/28/critical-realism-and-the-art-of-gift-giving/.

[75] Bhaskar's complete list for these stages is as follows: '(i) theoretical critique (satisfaction of the critical condition); (ii) explanatory critique (satisfaction of the explanatory condition); (iii) value judgement; (iv) practical judgement; (v) concrete axiological judgement; (vi) transformation in agent's praxis; (vii) emancipatory action, i.e. praxis oriented to emancipation; (viii) transformative praxis, consisting or culminating in the dissolution or progressive transformation of structural sources of determination (emancipating action); (ix) emancipated (free) action' (SRHE, p.188).

[76] This is not categorical in the sense that one action is completely heteronomous and another autonomous, or one either enjoys complete *enkrateia* or suffers from complete *akrasia*. The differentiation is usually a matter of degree and balance in a combination of forces.

that even the simplest-looking acts of love and goodwill, e.g. giving a gift to your niece, require them.

Philosophy has a way of revealing massive sets of presuppositions of *prima facie* small theoretical and practical baggage.[77] Let us pursue our example of gift-giving. Why, again, would we choose that one particular gift? How do we come to reach the judgement that our gift would contribute to the well-being and flourishing of our niece? My point is that in choosing the gift, we have engaged in at least some anthropology, as we would in any intentional moral action, including even many of the simplest, everyday ones, such as gift-giving.

But let us assume there is a nominalist, who, after picking a chess set as a gift for her niece (say, seven years old Katara), rejects the existence of universals and says, 'No, I have acted on the needs, desires and abilities of one particular human being, on what is good specifically for her. Why would any of that have to be universalizable into a grand theory encompassing human beings as such? Indeed, what makes a gift good is that it appeals to the uniqueness of the person to receive it, and in that sense, the act of gift-giving is the opposite of anthropology.[78] It is not generalizing, but singularizing that constitutes the essence of an act of kindness'. I will not go in-depth into an ancient nominalism-realism debate here, but this line of reasoning implies that in the nominalist objector's CAJ, knowledge and understanding of what it means to be a human being have no relevance for her judgement, and its adequacy is based only on her knowledge and understanding of

[77] This is what Socratic inquiry does, when Socrates examines some thesis put forth by his interlocutor via a dialogue of the question and answer form, and usually the discussion ends up in the domain of ethics. This is also the genus of what Bhaskar calls transcendental argumentation: you take something and move from there to arguments about what the world must be like for that something to be possible and intelligible. ('A transcendental enquiry is identified as an enquiry into the conditions of the possibility of φ, where φ is some especially significant, central or pervasive feature of our experience' [SRHE, p.7]). Many critical realist tenets are 'derivable' in this sense via many different routes. And arguably, this is what philosophy per se aims at.

[78] I use the term 'anthropology' throughout this secion in the broadest possible sense of the not-necessarily-academic study of humanity and its relations with the environment.

the particular niece Katara. This would mean that the objector has, although implicitly, presupposed that Katara is able to learn and enjoy chess in virtue merely of a Katara-ness that is defined independently of her humanness, and derivative qualities such as age, needs (in their hierarchical structure), etc., which seems to be absurd. She would have to either deny that her niece is a human being or demonstrate that her humanness does not contribute at all to what she is and that all the predicates she needed to presuppose to develop her CAJ are exclusive to her. With the nominal agreement that Katara is a human child, knowledge of her Katara-ness has direct relevance for anthropology in various ways, one being that it establishes a fact that it has been possible to actualize her distinct history and unique character within the given potential of humanity.[79]

A plausible approach would concede a CAJ could be grounded in presuppositions such as that the niece is a human and a child, and that one particular activity in which children *need* to engage is play, and that chess, as a game, both meets that need to some degree and facilitates cognitive and emotional development in human beings. This is anthropology still at a very superficial level, and in reality it can be excavated as deep as the level of granting the ability of human beings for symbolically mediating ideas (the level of species-differentiation), but arguably even deeper, that they are causally efficacious (that they are *real*, so that a human being can bring about change in the world -otherwise what could Katara ever do with the chess set?). It is very much possible to have *concrete universals*[80]: an ineradicable humanness mediated and singularized in a particular person called Katara. An important point is that one would not be avoiding anthropology had she chosen any other gift. Even in the cases of questionable gifts, such as a bottle of wine or a copy of *Das Capital*, one would only be, doing some bad anthropology, presupposing that seven is a suitable age for consuming alcohol or starting to read Marx. Another important point is that it is not relevant whether one thinks in these general terms (the species-being scale) when one reaches a concrete

[79] All biography is in this sense in part anthropology.
[80] See DPF, ch.2, sec.7.

axiological judgement, or whether one rushes to her library for academic resources on anthropology. My position is the humble one that the ontology of anthropology (the intransitive dimension, the human being) *in part* determines our judgement to be good or bad and that therefore anthropology (in its transitive dimension) is axiologically presupposed in our judgement, not necessarily on a full-scale or conscious level.[81]

Ways in which anti-anthropism can relate to anthropology

How can anti-anthropism relate to anthropology? There are two levels in which critical realism tackles this relation. One is the level of philosophical anthropology: critical realism contends that to be human is among other things to be able to referentially detach oneself, meaning simply the detachment of the referent from reference. Investigation of a tree (the real referent of inquiry) consists in the investigation of something radically other to the signs with which we come to think of the tree (the reference). This capacity includes reflexivity in the sense that humans can not only detach referents but also the act of referentially detaching them, as is the case with the philosophical investigation of reference.

> 'This is the detachment of the act by which we refer to something from that to which it refers, or of reference from referent. Discourse must be about something other than itself, at the very least potentially, for us to be able to refer at all. (Even if it is about itself it must be objectified as a real social entity for us or anyone else to refer to it again—e.g. for the purposes of the clarification of its meaning or the adjudication of its truth.) In the same way, desire must be for something other than itself (that is to say, to use Brentano's phrase, it must have an 'intentional object' to which it is internally related) for it to count as desire—even if the desire be for the state of desire. Again, actions must be with something other than themselves (ingredients, tools, words) for the agent to be said to perform an act (cooking a meal, constructing a kitchen, saying 'well done!').[82]

This line of reasoning is propelled by the same impulse that Plato pursued in determining that the *objects* of knowledge, the referents, must be the things as they are in themselves (the intransitive dimension in critical realist terminology), and these must be differentiated from the tools humans

[81] Nevertheless it could be argued that we inevitably and implicitly do tap into our understanding of what human beings are, what they need, what their potentials are, what their ethos and telos consists in etc. in all our moral praxis.

[82] PE, p.12.

have contingently tailored to be able to refer to them (the transitive dimension). Returning to the above question, one way to relate anti-anthropism to anthropology is to define it as an essential capacity of human beings. Indeed, 'to be human', as Hartwig has put it, 'is among other things, precisely to be able to be non-anthropic'.[83]

The other level in which anti-anthropism relates to anthropology is already embedded in the above exposition but is more difficult to pinpoint. Consider a form of the anthropic fallacy, the reduction of being to discourse. Imagine that one extreme version of this lies in a prohibition of any talk of human nature or essence based on the premise that these are radically historical and discursive to the point that their investigation cannot surpass the boundaries of the conventions of the discursive practices of any given society. As any attempt for a real definition would be essentialist, the only task before us could be an excavation into, and an unravelling of the history of the formation of these as parts of a discourse embedded in power struggles. A parallel lineage might extend into scare quotes around the word 'reality': there is no truth to be reached due to problems of incommensurability, the only possible outcome of ethnographic research could be the descriptive understanding of self-narratives of peoples attained via interpretation (as opposed to explanation). It would be unfair to condemn these positions quickly and harshly since there are serious perils in some forms of essentialisms and vulgar claims to objectivity. But in their extreme forms, they nullify the possibility of political and moral judgements altogether. The problem with such positions is that it is difficult to pass a negative judgement on practices like female genital mutilation without a degree of objective detachment from the given customs and morals of some societies and without any references to a common 'species-being' as humans. Extreme forms of anthropic fallacy can thus put the political and moral relevance of anthropology at stake.[84]

[83] Mervyn Hartwig, "Humanism," in *Dictionary*.
[84] This relevance seems readily apparent for Eagleton, as it was for Aristotle: 'If another creature is able in principle to speak to us, engage in material labour alongside us, sexually interact with us, produce something which looks vaguely like art in the sense that it appears fairly pointless, suffer, joke and die, then we can deduce from these biological facts a huge number of moral and even political consequences. This, at least, is

Anti-anthropism and anthropology for emancipatory human agency

Just as important as critical realism's insistence on the epistemological need for anti-anthropist decentring manoeuvres is its attempt to provide a meta-theory that establishes the possibility and discovers the conditions of, *human* emancipation via *human* agency. Marx may have decentered history and society, but it was the same Marx who in his life-long political struggle tried to bring to life a society in which people took rational control over the relations of production that in the capitalist mode of production impose themselves upon the very people who reproduced them as if they are unhistorical, natural necessities with (truly) irrational, objective, inexorable *modi operandi*. As Eagleton has said, 'Marx had nothing but scorn for the idea that there was something called History which had purposes and laws of motion quite independent of human beings.'[85] *Pace* Althusser's interpretation, I would argue that especially the first three chapters of *Capital* can still be legitimately read from the perspective of the problem of alienation dominant in Marx's earlier works, which necessarily requires a theory of *unalienated* human existence – i.e. a philosophical anthropology in some form or other– and they make it clear that Marx's ultimate goal was to reclaim the role of rational human agency in history. Freud in his scientific work did decenter the human psyche, but it was the same Freud whose therapeutic practice was based on the premise that the agent, reaching a higher level of understanding of the dynamics of his or her psychic constitution, would have more reflexive and rational power on his or her thoughts and actions.

For critical realism, the principle of anti-anthropism similarly serves the purpose of enabling and facilitating ethical and political agency. For emancipation to be possible, among other things, we need knowledge, and the intelligibility of knowledge-yielding practices presupposes that the objects of inquiry are not mere appearances or necessarily suitable for conversion into observable items of

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one sense in which we can derive values from facts, whatever David Hume may have thought.' Terry Eagleton, *The Illusions of Postmodernism* (Oxford: Blackwell Publishers Inc, 1997), 47.

[85] Op. cit., p.45.

quantitative data (the domain of the empirical), nor necessarily and universally the concrete, particular instantiations of essences of things (the domain of the actual)[86], but the real (possibly changing) essences, powers, liabilities and dispositions of things as distinct from their appearances and actualizations, which are highly contingent in open systems where a vast multiplicity of causal relations prevail. What separates critical realist anti-anthropism from Althusser's theoretical anti-humanism, under the rubric of which he defines the epistemological break of the mature Marx of *Capital* while condemning the young Marx for engaging in a philosophical anthropology, is that critical realism is (a) not only consistent with philosophical anthropology but tries to demonstrate that ethics and politics *presuppose* philosophical anthropology, (b) gestures towards a project of universal human flourishing based on anthropology-imbued notions such as needs and rights with politically humanist implications for social theory and action and c) underscores, rather than overscore, the potential (and contingently actual) role of collective transformative human agency in history. This capacity for non-anthropism makes possible knowledge and in turn explanatory critiques that inform projects of social transformation, and it is indispensable for the full realization of our potential for flourishing, which includes the fulfilling of ever-changing human needs and actualization of human rights.

The theory of explanatory critique has abstractly demonstrated that moving from facts to values is legitimate once formal criteria that are derived from essential presuppositions of any epistemic discourse are met. Identifying some mechanisms as the necessary sources of illusion is itself sufficient for, *ceteris paribus*, a negative evaluation of such mechanisms and a positive evaluation of action towards the transformation of them.[87] It is anthropology in its widest sense as the study of human beings that can provide the concrete context under which *concrete axiological judgements* could be formed for such transformations, and this is arguably one of the senses of Bhaskar's

[86] Consider the case of rationalizing capitalist relations of production by defining human nature as such by the egoist, competitive and possessive personality traits paradigmatic of capitalist societies and conceived as eternal and fixed, and as the only possible actualized product of human capacities.
[87] See SRHE, ch.2.5-2.8.

sweepingly concise and ambitious contention in *Scientific Realism and Human Emancipation* that 'as ontology stands to epistemology, so anthropology stands to ethics; indeed one could say that anthropology just is the ontology of ethics'.[88]

The philosophical anthropology of critical realism is no doubt different from those of Plato and Aristotle, but it is consistent with these ancient figures in that quests for truth require anti-anthropism, while ethics and (hence) politics require anthropology, and can underlabour for anti-anthropist humanism informed (among other disciplines) by anthropology.

[88] Op. cit., p.140.

Chapter 3: Roy Bhaskar's *Dialectic: The Pulse of Freedom*

What is in an epigraph?

There is a double irony in that the *Dialectic* opens with the words by Parmenides of Plato's dialogue with the same name of the Eleatic philosopher:

'Let this be said, then; and also that, as it seems, whether one is or is not, both itself and the others, both to themselves and to each other, all in every way both are and are not and appear and do not appear.'

These are Parmenides's last words in the dialogue, and a slight irony lies of course in starting a work with the closing remarks of another philosopher. But the more substantial irony is in that this quotation seems to endorse some key points of *Dialectic*, which aims to carry through an extensive critique of the Parmenidean decree that bars one from thinking the *not*[89], a thesis thus characterized by what Bhaskar calls *ontological monovalence* which takes being as something 'purely positive and present'.[90]

It is difficult to analyse the quotation into bits of clear theses, but it is possible to show, albeit with some anachronistic decomposition, that it is shot through with two important dialectical themes:

[89] '(Fr. 2) Come now, I will tell (…) the only ways of inquiry that are to be thought of. The one, that it is and that it is impossible for it not to be, is the path of Persuasion (for she attends on Truth). The other, that it is not, and that it must necessarily not be, that I declare is a wholly indiscernible track; for thou couldst not know what is not –that is impossible– nor declare it, (fr. 3) for it is the same thing that can be thought and can be.' Parmenides, as translated in Guthrie, W. K. C, *A History Of Greek Philosophy. Volume II, The Presocratic Tradition from Parmenides to Democritus* (Cambridge and London: Cambridge University Press, 1965), 13–14. Note that Parmenides is not making a purely epistemological point here. It is not that being might include non-existence and negativity but we simply cannot think or know about it. The last sentence (like various others in his poem) rather implies that the reason one cannot think about the 'not' is that it cannot 'be'. As it is always the case in philosophy, ontology and epistemology take their cue from each other.

[90] Mervyn Hartwig, "Humanism," in *Dictionary*.

1) Negativity: '(…) one and the others (…) are and are not (…)'. Ontology is imbued with both positivity and negativity. One *is* not, and one is *not*. The 'notness' is included in beings. In the course of Dialectic's critique of Parmenidean monism this relation of being and negativity (and positivity) will be analysed also in terms of absence (and presence).

2) Relationality: "(…) both to themselves and each other (…)". The 'is'ness and 'not'ness of 'one' is discussed not atomistically. It includes a reference to its relations with others. This gestures toward a critique of methodological individualism, in the sense that an analysis of being is inadequate if it is limited to the discussion of the 'is'ness and 'not'ness of 'one' *to itself* only. In order to reach an adequate analysis of being, there is a relational dimension needed, the 'is'ness and 'not'ness of one *to others.* In the course of *Dialectic* this idea will be developed towards a concept of totality, where the 'one' is defined by its relation not only both to itself and 'others' but also to the whole.

There is also a hint of *realism* and *depth*. Although not a *dialectical* theme per se, the quotation also seems vaguely coherent with another key conception of *Dialectic*, the differentiation of the empirical and the real*:* "(…) one and the others (…) both appear and do not appear." Although critical realism can arguably accept the idea of a thing that does not 'appear' in *any* way, and thereby departs from the quotation, there is a partial affinity because by the words of Plato's Parmenides, being is not totally and necessarily given to sense-perception, hence the empirical is not identical to the real. This gives "being" a weak and general sense of objectivity or mind-independence since appearance presupposes a perceiving entity, and a weak and general sense of depth, at least in the Lockean terms of a differentiation of manifestation and essence.

The One and the Many

Thus begins Roy Bhaskar's magisterial work, *Dialectic: The Pulse of Freedom.* With it, critical realism, which did already have strong dialectical notions such as scientific change (both progress and regress), social transformation and internal connections between structure and agency and so on, takes a more direct turn towards the dialectical tradition. The book is many things at once. It is the most overtly ethical work of Bhaskar theretofore, but it could as well be read as an essay in political philosophy as one in moral philosophy. In places it is sweeping. It sweeps massive terrains of metaphysics, musing upon the very fabric of being, while at the same time offering a critical history of philosophy, going back to Parmenides and setting the scene for disputes between Plato and Aristotle. But in other places it is meticulously specific. Via an intricate conceptual dismantling of Hegelian thought, it aims to achieve the goal that Marx had set for himself, providing an adequate account of the rational kernel in Hegel's philosophy, and goes further to raise a detailed, original and radical theory of dialectic.

Moreover, *Dialectic* is the work in which Bhaskar engages most seriously in themes that form in part the problematic of postmodern thought. Bhaskar does this arguably in a fashion more sympathetic to postmodernism than some interpreters might believe him to do[91], even tough he does it mostly by proxy of dialectic. But what a proxy! An ambitious theory of dialectic can at once animate a 'grand narrative',[92] a taboo-like cause of suspicion in postmodernist thinking, while

[91] Such as Mervyn Hartwig (for instance, in his introduction to DPF), and Alan Norrie (his *Dialectic and Difference*). For a recent work that bends the stick towards the other end (in favor of post-structuralist thought), see Timothy Rutzou's intellectually bold PhD thesis: *In Pursuit of the Real – Postmodernism and Critical Realism.* One objection to the latter could be that it would be more charitable if Rutzou had engaged more with the dialectical works of Bhaskar, instead of limiting his post-structuralist critique almost exclusively to earlier texts of the basic CR stage.

[92] Cf. Fleetwood: 'Moreover, critical realism focuses neither on one, or a small number, of topics in the philosophy of science, but is wide ranging, covering topics such as: ontology, epistemology, modes of inference, nature of causality, nature of laws, tendencies, role of abstraction, distinction between essence and appearance, criterion for theory evaluation, and so on. For brevity, I refer to such an all-encompassing philosophy of science as full-blown. And critical realism is a full-blown philosophy of science.' "Critical Realism: Augmenting Marxism," in *Critical Realism and Marxism: The Marriage of Critical Realism and Marxism*, ed. Andrew Brown, Steve Fleetwood, and John Michael Roberts (London and New York:

serving as a 'great loosener'[93] to the effect of alleviating post-structuralist concerns of fluidity, flexibility, permeability, volatility, difference, relationality, singularity, contextuality, mediation, and openness; notions which are topical of post-structuralism at its most subversive.

The Dialecticisation of Ontology / The Ontologisation of Dialectic

Bhaskar's understanding of dialectic is not confined to epistemology. The origin of the word 'dialectic' in Greek, (*dialegein*)**,** roughly denotes a cluster of closely related activities such as arguing, conversing and discussing, but as 'dialectic' started to turn into a technical term, it took on the meanings of the art of reasoned debate, and argument by question and answer. Plato and Aristotle referred to it as a method for truth-seeking.[94] Broadly speaking within this ancient Greek context, according to this method, to inquire about a certain matter people would engage in a back-and-forth discussion where they appraise ideas, discover their presuppositions or unravel their conclusions and identify and comb out contradictions in their thinking. Centuries later, for Hegel, dialectic was a dynamo for the whole of being, compelling it into motion and change. But this 'coming of being', 'becoming', which is the moment of dialectic proper, still looked very much like an epistemic process: it was the process of being coming to recognize and know its very self. While dialectical processes were ontological, they were deemed dialectical only by virtue of being conceived under the aspect of this epistemic process, incorporating a certain logic. In other words,

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Routledge, 2002), 3. The term 'grand narrative' is coined by Lyotard in his *The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge,* but through extremely popular usage its scope has extended with inevitable modifications in meaning. In CR's appropriation it connotes 'full-blown' philosophical systems (of which critical realism is one) and 'totalising theories of geo-history and social systems' (Mervyn Hartwig, "Narrative," in *Dictionary*).

[93] 'We begin to envisage dialectic as the great 'loosener', permitting empirical 'open-texture', in the manner of Waismann, and structural fluidity and interconnectedness, in a Marxian-Bakhtinian fashion, alike (and their distinction to boot)', (DPF, p.40).

[94] For Plato it was *the* practice of truth-seeking and had the utmost status in human pursuits. For Aristotle it was lower in the ranks compared to syllogistic demonstrations, but still played an important role for knowledge-yielding practices by way of clarifying ideas, testing hypotheses, training and convincing others. For varying interpretations of how the two philosophers thought differently or alike about dialectic, see Fink, *Development of Dialectic from Plato to Aristotle*.

dialectic now had a more objective bent, but it was still a theory of knowing, even though that knowing was the self-knowing of objective being. Ontology was dialecticised, but at the expense of a colonization by epistemology. So we still lacked a notion of a dialectical ontology as distinct from epistemology. With Marx we see the first serious attempt to properly ontologise the notion of dialectic through the materialist critique of Hegel, but unlike Engels, he never got around to articulating his own general theory of dialectic.

The extent to which Marx endorsed Engels' general theory of dialectic, formulated most plainly in *Anti-Dühring* and *Dialectics of Nature,* remains open to discussion. Bhaskar notes that 'While the evidence strongly indicates that Marx agreed with the general thrust of Engels's intervention, his own analysis of capitalism neither presupposed nor entailed any dialectics of nature. At the same time his critique of a priorism (...) implies the a posteriori and subject-specific character of claims about the existence of dialectical or other types of processes in reality.' (DPF, p.140). In this vein, it is also important to note that the ontologisation of dialectics does not imply a necessary naturalisation of dialectics, hence Bhaskar's reminder, 'there cannot be a global dialectics of nature (qua being)' (DPF, p.315). Dialectic cannot be inflated into an *a priori* principle of being as such, and disputes over its existence in nature have to be settled with '*a posteriori and* subject-specific' substantial natural scientific inquiries. It is just as important to note that an ontologisation of dialectic does not necessarily entail a generalisation of it.[95] The panlogism of Hegel makes his dialectic perhaps the most generalised dialectic of all. With *Dialectic: The Pulse of Freedom,* Bhaskar carries Marx's baton forward in this project through a series of cautious qualifications, specifications and delimitations as well as generalizations, extensions and radicalizations. *Dialectic* undertakes both a radical yet qualified dialecticisation of ontology, and a radical yet qualified ontologisation of dialectic, and thereby transforms critical realism into dialectical critical realism.

[95] '(…) dialectics or dialectical movements cannot exhaust the study of change. There are non-dialectical movements and changes in the social and natural world, of which the most important is probably the entropic transformation of a structure into its elements' (FCR, p.126).

The Ethical Kernel of Dialectical Critical Realism

Marx and Engels, in their *Manifesto of the Communist Party*, describe their projection of the good society with these words: '(…) an association, in which the free development of each is the condition for the free development of all.'[96] The theme of 'free development' resurfaces frequently in the work of Marx, who was well-read on ancient Greek philosophy (his doctoral thesis was on Epicurus and Democritus) and especially fond of Aristotle. Engels throws more light upon the latent Aristotelian gist of the notion of free development, by linking it together with the cultivation of human capacities, which is the defining feature of the good life according to Aristotle: 'an existence not only fully sufficient materially, and becoming day by day more full, but an existence guaranteeing to all the free development and exercise of their physical and mental faculties.'[97]

Bhaskar brings this eudaimonian foundation to the fore. Amidst the vast and thick conceptual jungle of *Dialectic*, a meta-ethical core idea emerges, with the words of Mervyn Hartwig, in the form of a definition of *'the moral alethia*[98] *as object/ive of human being'*: which is *'the free development of each as a condition of the free development of all'*[99]. This is not intended as an all-in-one prescription, a rule of conduct, a moral precept, an imperative (let alone a categorical one), or a self-evident maxim. It is thus important to maintain its contingent, non-absolute and meta-ethical standing. As Hartwig puts it in his introduction, 'there can be no general theory of the thing to do', our ethical positions will always be 'concretely singularised and context-specific'.[100] But as I will stipulate through the course of this work, the demarcation of meta-ethics, ethics, and everyday

[96] Tucker, *The Marx-Engels Reader*, 491.

[97] Engels, 'Socialism: Utopian and Scientific', in Tucker, *Marx-Engels Reader*, 715.

[98] Literally meaning 'lack of forgetfulness', *aletheia* is the ancient Greek concept for truth. 'Alethia' is its anglicized form. We will see where it fits in the system of dialectical critical realism later.

[99] Hartwig, 'Introduction' to DPF, p.xxiv.

[100] 'Introduction' to DPF, p.xxiii.

morality is possible at best with a *dashed* line. If our actions were to be never informed by our meta-ethics (whether they are implicit or explicit), what would be the point of engaging in moral philosophy?

The kernel, as it is worded in this particular way, has several implications. Firstly, it describes a moral 'object' for human beings; an end, rather than a code of action. When taken in isolation, it could therefore be seen to espouse a *teleological* ethics, more than it espouses a deontological one. Consequently the emphasis is on the *good* (as an end), rather than the *right* (thing to do). [101] Secondly, it identifies a morality that is 'objective' of human beings, thus rests upon a conception of 'human being' as bearing some possibly knowable properties, and thereby embraces anthropology. Thirdly, as I mentioned, it is eudaimonistic as conceived by the ancient Greeks, in a very plain and literal sense: the moral objective is put in terms of a development, a *flourishing*.[102] This has the sub-implications of processuality and open-endedness, since the object is not fixed in terms of a final state, it is a becoming, a work-in-progress; and it has a built-in ontological depth in that the notion of development entails a distinction between the potential and the actual (if what human beings can possibly be were identical to what they currently are, there would be no room for development). And fourthly, (a) its eudaimonism, 'understood as *universal* human flourishing'[103] (emphasis added), is *socialized*[104], as the flourishing of everyone (understood as comprising a whole) is tied to

[101] However, it should be noted that critical realism does not subscribe to the idea of a diametric opposition between good and right, nor between teleological and deontological ethics. With the inclusion of virtue ethics, consequentialism and utilitarianism into the discussion, this cartography of meta-ethics gets even more complicated. As we will see, critical realism navigates these terrains dialectically, seeing them in their inter-connectedness (allowing for contradictions) and as liable to totalisation, rather than analytically, like adjacent territorial realms dividing a land into separate sovereigns. We should refrain from uncritical (non-transformative) and arbitrary totalisations (which can sometimes wrongly pass as 'sublations') as well as from turning distinctions and matters of emphasis into hard-line categorizations.

[102] Indeed Bhaskar usually replaces the word 'development' with 'flourishing' when reiterating this 'kernel'.

[103] DPF, p.111.

[104] I will discuss the extent to which its Platonic and Aristotelian forms are in need of bolstering in this respect later. But *prima facie* we could say that any conception of a good society that sanctions slavery and confirms male superiority is going to be lacking in its universality. To be fair, this applies to Aristotle a lot more than it does to Plato.

that of every other with the causal relation of conditioning. So under this description, no one can flourish unless everyone can flourish. And (b) when we flip the medal, on the other side we see that its notion of the freely developed society ('all') is differentiated through acknowledging the significance of the development of every unique, singular human being ('each') for the whole society. I acknowledge that the medallion is not exactly symmetrical. In the above wording, the latter (b) is accentuated. This can be remedied by complementing 'the free development of each as a condition of the free development of all' with *'the free development of all as a condition of the free development of each'*.

The problematic of *Dialectic*

Critical realism already had a powerful theory regarding the possibility of moving logically from facts to values, namely the theory of explanatory critique (EC). According to this theory, if we can show that certain beliefs are false and that they are caused by and necessary for some social structure, that is, if we can establish at once a *critique* and *explanation* of them, we can move to a negative evaluation of that social structure itself. *Ceteris paribus*, this in turn warrants a positive evaluation of practices towards transforming that structure. These types of transition from facts, the argument goes, while yielding new values, require no initial values other than a commitment to truth, which is already presupposed by all factual discourse.

In Roy Bhaskar's *Dialectic: The Pulse of Freedom*, which is written after the theory of explanatory critiques was fully articulated, the notion of *universal human flourishing* shifts towards the centre of the stage, motivating bolder contours of a philosophical anthropology; concepts from ancient Greek ethics, largely absent in his prior works, are put to use; and a commitment to *moral realism*, in addition to the prior commitment to ethical naturalism by the theory of explanatory critiques, is spelt out for the first time. In my critical exegesis of this work, I will analyze the scope of this meta-

ethical reorientation made in *Dialectic*. I will extract and diffract an ethico-political theory from *Dialectic* with an eye to whether any 'absences' of EC are 'absented', and investigate whether there are substantial surplus-elements of ethics in dialectical critical realism, elements that go over and above just a formal transposition and further explication of the theory of explanatory critique. What was pre-dialectical CR lacking? What consequence did this have for its ethics?

There appear two connected problems/objectives: 1) (a) What exactly is the ethics that *Dialectic* proposes, (b) what is novel about it and why was it needed? 2) (c) Why was a *dialectical* and anti-Parmenidean view of being necessary for this ethics, and (d) what *is* that new theory of dialectic and metaphysics? My ultimate goal in expounding the dialecticisation of critical realism by dealing with these problems is to demonstrate that *Dialectic* can best be read as a text laying the 'groundwork' for, and invoking the ramifications of the eudaimonian moral (as incorporating political) nucleus which is partly indebted to ancient Greece. We will see in the following sections that the adoption and particular emplacement of terms such as practical wisdom (phronesis), balance (sophrosyne) and flourishing (eudaimonia) are not arbitrary. It indicates a growing tendency to lean against and revive ancient Greek ethics. In my exposition, I will underline these ancient-Greek roots and investigate why Bhaskar felt the need to draw on this tradition. In order to arrive at the ethics of *Dialectic* at (1a) via the course of an argument, from the ontological underpinnings to a distinct emancipatory axiology, we need to start with the base at (2d), that is, the structure and specifics of the new dialectic and metaphysics themselves.

Bhaskar at the outset declares that the arguments in *Dialectic* do not presuppose scientific practices (p. xxxiii). This is new and important especially for the methodology and metaphilosophy of critical realism. CR had been developed explicitly as a philosophy of science, and argued for a specific way of doing philosophy, which consisted of immanent critique and transcendental argument. For immanent critique, one grabs on an idea that he or she finds plausible in his or her intellectual

adversary, and shows they are not able to sustain it adequately or without contradicting some other position they hold. And transcendental argument proceeds by analyzing the conditions of possibility of a human experience or activity: what must be the case for such and such experience or activity to be possible? In the case of original critical realism, the intellectual adversary was positivism with its various disguises and inadequate critiques of it, and the activity picked was science. Its analysis and critique rested on taking scientific practice in one sense for 'granted', because the inquiry was into the conditions of the possibility -add in the intelligibility, rationality, practical achievements, and progress, which sometimes silently sneak into the pool of premises of the argument- of certain scientific practices, chiefly experimentation in physics and chemistry.[105] Bhaskar believed that his opponents were trying to accommodate these practices in their system, but were not doing so sufficiently, consistently or coherently.

More abstractly, in the metaphilosophy of (earlier *and* later) CR, philosophy in general is defined as something syncategorematic: there's a limit to how much of its own grounds it could provide, a limit to how much it can justify itself as a stand-alone practice. Philosophy ultimately has to be *of* something. Its real significance lies in its relation to something else, and originally, that something that drove the philosophical project of Roy Bhaskar forward was science. So the arguments in critical realism hitherto *did* presuppose scientific practices.

Bhaskar seems ready to drop science from his bag of premises in reaching his philosophical conclusions, but does that mean he has stopped taking knowledge and truth seriously? On the contrary, this move seems to presage an ever more inclusive and enticing approach to them, one that does not limit them to scientific knowledge and facts. It is a more generalized theory of the 'form of judgements' from which Bhaskar transitions 'to the content of a freely flourishing society', and he

[105] Bhaskar himself counts 'possible, intelligible, successful and ongoing' in FCR, p.58.

contends that it is a ‘combination of moral realism and ethical naturalism’ that allows him to do this.

As Collier and Bhaskar point out in their chapter introduction in *ER*, the theory of explanatory critiques did ‘[open] up the possibility of … a moral realism’, but the preface to *Dialectic* is nevertheless the first place Bhaskar openly commits to ‘moral realism’ in his works. Indeed it seems these two positions refer to the two sides of the TD/ID distinction: only if moral realism holds in the intransitive dimension could ethical naturalism in the transitive dimension be possible. The premise of this particular, critical realist form of ethical naturalism is that social science can substantially inform us about morality, and facts can logically entail values, so that we can increase our knowledge of values or discover new ones with social science; criticize, correct and enhance our existing morality in the light of our developing social scientific knowledge. But if morality can become an object of study for social science in such a way, this is possible only because objectively real morality exists in the world, which is the basic premise of, again, a particular, critical realist form of, moral realism. In this way ethical naturalism presupposes moral realism, and moral realism can be said to be transcendentally deducible from ethical naturalism, in that one could reach morally realist conclusions by inquiring into the conditions of possibility of ethical naturalism.

Bhaskar sets three interconnected objectives for his book: dialecticising critical realism, developing a new dialectic and ‘[outlining] the elements of a totalizing critique of western philosophy’ which suffers from taking an ‘insufficiently nonanthropocentric, differentiated, stratified, dynamic,

holistic (concrete)[106] or agentive view of things', resulting in an 'anthropomorphizing,[107] actualizing,[108] monovalent and detotalizing ontology'. Let us unpack some of the terminology used in this statement.

Stratification and differentiation might be seen as operating on the vertical and horizontal axes of ontology respectively. The concept of differentiation captures the distinction between *closed systems*, where typically constant conjunctions obtain and event regularities of the sort 'whenever event x, then event y' prevail, and *open systems*, where they typically do not (SRHE, p.18; *Dictionary*, p.66). In open systems a multiplicity (not only in sheer number, but also type and/or level) of generative mechanisms are at work, and closed systems are typically established by praxis. Among examples of this kind of praxis might be the programming work of software engineers, and the experiment-building work of scientists in which some specific set of generative mechanisms are artificially isolated so that they can be studied without the non-controlled intervention of other generative mechanisms. Since absolute closure can never be procured except perhaps in theoretical

[106] For Bhaskar, things are normally multi-faceted compounds with complex structures and are themselves normally composed of other things. Abstraction pulls some thing (or feature of a thing) apart from the cluster of relations or totality of which it is a part and considers it in isolation. So although abstraction is obviously necessary for thought to be possible, since it is the mode of thinking that provides us the generality and universality captured in concepts, categories etc., there is always a necessary partiality to abstraction. "Concretion" on the other hand puts things (or features of things) back together into their context, the complicated nexus that is a whole. That is why the concepts 'holistic' and 'concrete' have gotten paired in this way. The more holistic a view gets, the more concrete it becomes and vice versa.

[107] Non-anthropocentrism and non-anthropomorphism together comprise the defining feature of realism. The utmost significance for critical realism of these two concepts (and *anthropism* which conjoins them) will be analysed later in this work.

[108] Reducing the real to the actual. The domain of the real, as conceptualized by Bhaskar, includes generative mechanisms and structures as well as the events they produce, while the domain of the actual is conceptualized as comprised of events and states of affairs. This reduction amounts to ignoring the stratification of ontology, or *destratification* of it in the sense defined in the relevant footnote above. More generally, actualism could be understood as involving the reduction of possibility or potentiality to actuality or kinesis, universals to particulars, laws and kinds to instances, types to tokens; dispositions to actions, essences to their manifestations. Some simplistic but didactically useful examples are the reduction of personhood to behavior, human nature to the prevailing ethos of contemporary capitalist societies, socialism to "actually (or previously) existing socialisms", Islam to the practices and belief systems of some designated group of (say, radical) Islamists, talent to ability, ability to performance etc.

realms (for instance, functions in mathematics), closure should be understood as a matter of degree and as relative. After all, there are event regularities in open systems (the sun "rises" every morning and the day is followed by the night) and irregularities in closed systems (most software needs to be continuously debugged and operating systems regularly maintained, and no matter how much Galileo polishes the surface of the inclined plane of his experimental setting, the distance covered by a freely falling body will never increase absolutely proportionally to the square of the measured time). Nature, society, a personality, a cat's body and reality in general are all open systems, and events are typically multiply determined.

Stratification is strongly related to the notions of *ontological depth, primacy* and *emergence*. Suffice it to say for now that together, these concepts describe the way in which being is multi-tiered: some things hold existential or causal (not simple diachronic) priority over others, forming hierarchically ordered levels or strata of reality. For example, mental processes are existentially dependent upon life (and not vice versa), and life is in turn unilaterally existentially dependent upon matter. In a more specific sense of stratification, a stratified view makes a distinction between *structures* and *generative mechanisms*, such as wave properties and simple harmonic motion, and *events*, such as particular sounds coming out of plucked guitar strings. It is the changing frequency of the sound wave produced by the more or less rapidly vibrating metal strings that (in part) explains the higher or lower-pitched guitar sound, not only the plucking of the guitarist, and it is philosophically significant, as the earlier stages of critical realism demonstrate[109], to situate the former on a different level from the latter.[110]

An important point about the 'Preface' and 'Objectives' sections of DPF is a repeated expression of intent to engage with the theoretical problems related to the 'crisis of socialism'. Bhaskar arguably

[109] See RTS ch.3, sec.3.
[110] For a brief account of the three different senses of stratification adopted by critical realism, see ECS, pp.31-32.

has always been working in the socialist, and more specifically (though in some senses more broadly), the Marxian tradition, and DPF is the work in which his intellectual efforts are the most concentrated on the philosophical problems besetting political and moral thought, in turn besetting, and of course also beset by, the contemporary plights of emancipatory political mass struggles at the time, including the crises of socialism and Marxism on an international scale.

A closely related objective is defined as to 'realize Marx's unconsummated desire "to make accessible to the ordinary human intelligence [...] what is rational in the method which Hegel discovered and at the same mystified", as well as to clarify the exact relation between Marx's own dialectic and Hegel's one' (p. 1). Dialectic here is seen under the aspect of its opposition to analytical modes of thought, and we will soon see that this objective carries within it an ambition to demonstrate that dialectic is more than just a method of exposition, that it plays a *substantial* role in the scientific work of Marx. This has the corollary that there is something about dialectic that cannot be simply 'analysed away', that some forms of scientific change cannot be accomplished and adequately described by analytical thought alone. DPF is thus a work that aims to show, *inter alia*, what made dialectic so important for Marx and Marxism.

The Epistemic and the Ontic Fallacies (EF & OF)

Bhaskar declares from the outset that the logic of his dialectic centers on the 'norms of truth and freedom', in line with the intense definition of dialectic in the title of the book as 'the pulse of freedom', reiterating its moral and political cast. We see wide contours drawn towards defining dialectic within which some popular stipulations are rejected such that dialectic, according to its critical realist conception, needs not assume the form of Hegelian triads, nor does it necessarily involve sublation, preservation (of the superseded state) and opposition, and dialectical processes are not exclusive to our ways of knowing and thinking. There are *ontological dialectics* as well as

epistemological dialectics, while a *relational dialectics* concerns the relations between these two. The three together correspond to the *intransitive*, *transitive* and *metacritical dimensions* respectively.

The 'intransitive dimension' (ID) is roughly synonymous with ontology. It is the sphere of real things, which may or may not come to be the referents or objects of human inquiry, conceived under the aspect of their existential and/or causal independence from such inquiries. The 'transitive dimension' (TD) is accordingly roughly synonymous with epistemology. It is the sphere of human inquiries conceived under the aspect of their distinction from what is inquired. It includes reference, knowledge and science, but also illusion, ignorance and ideology, together with their processual modes and social production, and may refer to any related human practice, ultimately encompassing the whole of culture. The wording rooted in 'transition' may lead to some ambiguities. It is important not to imagine these 'spheres' as quasi-physical spaces or geographical territories with fixed, 'intransitive' borders between them, with every ideational object in the transitive dimension 'corresponding' to, mapping onto, projecting or 'reflecting' its counterpart, the real object, in the intransitive dimension, like in a scientific remake of the game *Battleship*. 'Intransitivity' does not connote an epistemic impenetrability in the sense of not being susceptible to knowledge. Although there are some similarities, the distinction should not be identified with those between noumena and phenomena (as conceptualized by Kantian philosophy), matter and thought or the non-human and human. If attention to nuance is paid, it can get difficult to precisely differentiate the ID/TD pair in a cluster of associated pairs such as 'objectivity/subjectivity', 'ontology/epistemology', 'referent/reference', 'ontic/epistemic' etc, but if a choice is to be made, it seems 'ontic/epistemic' comes closest. There are places in Bhaskar's corpus where here very closely aligns (if not identifies) the transitive dimension in philosophy of science with a 'historical sociological dimension' (PIF, p. 8) or 'sociology' of science (RR ch.4 sec.1), which nicely expresses the spirit of the concept. One final note: in this brief exposition I have worked with a loose conception of the

term ‘ontology’, accommodating the sense of ‘being’, together with its technically more carefully confined sense, ‘philosophical study of being’. But at the end of the day it must be granted, as Jamie Morgan cautions, ‘A focus on ontology does not provide a charter to dominate all aspects of the investigation of reality. This is an epistemic fallacy by any other name. Ontology is not reality, it is a field of philosophical discourse.’[111]

Bhaskar buttresses his argument for realism by way of distilling the sap of some anti-realist injunctions against talking about being and exposing them as fallacious. To begin, let us consider the thesis ‘knowledge is being’. This posits a form of identity between thought and reality and it is clearly implausible: for sure knowledge is part of being, but there is more to being than our knowledge of it, and there is much to being that we do not know of, which is a condition of possibility for scientific progress and change (for if we already know everything, what room is there to increase or deepen or revise our knowledge?). If it were possible for humans to know everything about being (which includes non-human things), that still would not justify the identification of being with knowledge.[112] Even in the case where humans were finally to know *everything* about a particular area of being, such as apples, the body of knowledge regarding apples would not be the same as apples. Knowledge involves distinctions, definitions and explanations whereas apples do not involve them, and apples have skins and seeds and nutritious value for some animals while knowledge does not have them. This kind of disparity between knowledge of apples on the one hand and apples on the other, that is, a particular domain of knowledge and a particular domain of being, holds between knowledge and being in general. Indeed, being and our knowledge of being are *categorically* different, and to consider them the same is to confuse epistemology with ontology, committing a category mistake. Note that such a categorical distinction does not license a

[111] Jamie Morgan, “Analytical Philosophy’s Contribution to the Problem of Supervenience (Emergence),” *Journal of Critical Realism* 3, no. 1 (2004): 169–85.

[112] ‘…there is radical non-identity between our concepts (for example, the concept of a laser beam) and what they express (for example, a laser beam)’, (ECS, p.143, Hartwig’s note).

sundering. Epistemology and ontology are not dimensions in a sense analogical to separated physical realms or terrains, and they do not sit next to each other with a border cutting between them.[113] Ontology is the all-inclusive category. Epistemology is *part* of ontology just as knowledge is *part* of being. This is one way of saying knowledge is *real*. Another way is to invoke the causal criterion of reality: knowledge has the power to bring about change in the world. Knowledge is causally efficacious, and it is not only causally efficacious in epistemology (such that it exists only in contexts of scientific and educational activities), but also on non-epistemic beings (which is the condition of possibility of applied science, such that we can use our knowledge of mechanics to build planes, but it is also a condition of possibility of much of everyday acts such as peeling and slicing an apple). To say that knowledge is real is not to say that knowledge and reality are one and the same, nor that a particular domain of knowledge and its object are one and the same. So there is a distinction between distinction and sundering. Theory and practice are likewise distinct, yet there is no intransitive division among them: theoretical practice and practical theory are possible. But there is an asymmetry: theory without practice is not possible (all theory is practical) yet practices are only *quasi*-propositional. Knowledge without being is not possible yet being without knowledge is conceivable; and historical evidence suggests the Earth has been real for a long time with no sentient beings on it (to know anything). This entails a primacy of practice over theory, of being over knowledge and of ontology over epistemology. This is one way in which being is considered as differentiated (distinction) and stratified (primacy). As a parallel to the distinction between distinction and sundering, there is a distinction between unity and identity. Unity of theory and practice does not entail their identity, nor does situating epistemology in an overarching ontology entail *their* identity.

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[113] I think the coinages 'transitivity' and 'the transitive and intransitive' 'dimensions' were, pedagocially speaking, not ideal choices of terminology for this reason. They do seem to imply or connote such a sundered topology, even though conceptually that was clearly not Bhaskar's intention. This is probably the reason why Bhaskar used them less and less often and simply turned to the terms 'epistemology' and 'ontology' in his later thought.

But anti-realism very rarely comes in a simple form. Identification of knowledge and being can take quite ingenious guises. One such guise Bhaskar calls the '*epistemic fallacy*'. For rhetorical purposes let me first define it in an extremely pruned and simplified form: epistemic fallacy is the idea that all *talk* about being is *talk* about knowledge of being. It is obvious that this logically entails the thesis 'knowledge is being', the identification of being with knowledge I considered above. But in actual philosophical discourse that is guilty of this fallacy, it exists under many layers and can be disguised in many ways. A more developed form of the epistemic fallacy is the idea that all statements about being can be analysed in terms of statements about knowledge, or that it is possible to transpose discourse or statements about being to discourse or statements about knowledge. In this form it is a lot less trivial to show that this is indeed a fallacy compared to the thesis 'knowledge is being', and in this form it does not logically presuppose the thesis 'knowledge is being'. However even if it does not necessarily identify knowledge with being, it inadvertently or advertently presupposes that their distinction does not make a difference in practice, more specifically in our discursive practice. This moves our discourse on things in themselves down into a discourse on *things for us*, consequently comprising an illicit *reduction* of object to subject, being to knowledge, ontology to epistemology. In technical terms, this is a reduction of the intransitive dimension to the transitive dimension.

Of course concisely defining a philosophical idea and giving it the name 'fallacy' is not equivalent to refuting it, but Bhaskar does not simply take the fallaciousness of this 'fallacy' for granted. His first book, *A Realist Theory of Science*, could be interpreted as being devoted in its entirety to a critique of this thesis in its various forms in contemporary philosophy of science. If it can be shown that this thesis is untenable, and also that some important philosophical positions actually subscribe to it (whether wittingly or not) and, going even further, that this thesis is paradigmatic of irrealisms (in the sense of 'non-transcendental, incomplete, inexplicit or ineffable realism (...) such as an empirical, conceptual, intuitional and/or transcendent realism', SRHE, p.6) and anti-realisms, then a

substantial progress has been made in the way of defending realism. I cannot reproduce the whole body of argument here -the main line of which I have reproduced in the previous chapter on transcendental realism-, but throughout this work I have operated under the conviction that Bhaskar has indeed accomplished this.

According to realism, there are things that exist and act independently of our knowledge or ideas about them: the Earth has been revolving around the Sun even before we came to know about it, and even when we were believing the opposite (that the Sun was revolving around the Earth). Realism in this basic sense could roughly be defined as the idea that being is, to an important extent, mind-independent, or that there are aspects of being that are mind-independent.[114] This much appears as common sense, and not many philosophers would contest the mind- or human-independent reality of some things.[115] Protest begins when some realists also assert that we can, and indeed must *think* and *speak about* being in terms that attempt to capture in thought its thought-independent reality. This assertion amounts to claiming that it is possible to think and speak about things as they are in themselves. It is even more controversial to claim that we can have *knowledge* of mind-independent aspects of being: it is this line of thinking on which we hit the wall of the taboo of knowledge of things in themselves. But critical realism, in order to stay realist, has to bite the bullet here: to the extent that we claim to know some things about things, we have to claim that

[114] It is in this sense that realism could be described as a generalized version of anti-egocentrism, and a blend of anti-anthropocentrism and anti-anthropomorphism.

[115] Even Kant acknowledges the existence of 'things themselves'. I borrow from Dustin McWherter's clear illustration of this in his *The Problem of Critical Ontology: Bhaskar* Contra *Kant*, pp.159-160: '(…) Kant, eschewing total agnosticism about things in themselves, affirmed their actual existence in the *Prolegomena* to further distinguish himself from Berkeley. In Note II to the First Part, Kant distances himself from the idealist who asserts "that there are none other than thinking beings" and "representations in thinking beings, to which in fact no object existing outside these beings corresponds" (P 4: 288–9) with the following declaration: "I say in opposition: There are things given to us as objects of our senses existing outside us, yet we know nothing of them as they may be in themselves, but are acquainted only with their appearances, that is, with the representations that they produce in us because they affect our senses. Accordingly, I by all means avow that there are bodies outside us, that is, things which, though completely unknown to us as to what they may be in themselves, we know through the representations which their influence on our sensibility provides for us, and to which we give the name of a body – which word therefore merely signifies the appearance of this object that is unknown to us but is nonetheless real" (ibid. 4: 289)'.

our knowledge, although fallible, partial and ultimately restricted by human epistemic capacities, is *of* things as they are in themselves.[116] The distinction between 'things' and their 'appearances' is, essentially held both by idealism and critical realism, but with a crucial difference: realism treats this as an epistemological distinction, not an ontological one, while idealism either ascribes it an ontological status, consequently not *differentiating* reality but *sundering* it into knowable and unknowable realms, or stands ambiguous about its status. If it is granted that we do have knowledge of the world, but no knowledge of things in themselves, as Kant seems to strongly claim, then an ontological rift is inevitable, for if we cannot know anything about the thing-in-itself, what is it that about which we do know something? For critical realism there are no separate things, objects of knowledge or ontological 'realms' sitting next to each other, one susceptible to human knowledge and the other destined to remain in the dark. Ontologically speaking, the thing-in-itself is just *reality*, which is 'a potentially infinite totality of which we know something but not how much.'[117]

It is nevertheless crucial to mind the *gap* here between subject and object. The possibility of knowledge is not a matter of the possibility of omniscience but the possibility of *reference*. Our knowledge is only *of* things as they are in themselves; knowing something about a thing does not amount to *being* it, nor gaining a 'what-is-it-like-ness'[118] access. The knower and the known are still distinct. Knowledge in this sense can never exhaust its object: absolute knowledge of being as a

[116] It is tricky to talk in these Kantian terms while trying to avoid his transcendental idealism. If we stay altogether loyal to the Kantian senses of the concepts, the question 'can we know the thing in itself?' is in a sense rigged: 'the thing in itself' *itself* is defined by its insusceptibility to knowledge. But it still clear that Bhaskar holds that the 'various sciences [are] attempting to understand things and structures in themselves, at their own level of being.' (RTS, p.78). Indeed if things in themselves are defined simply as things as they exist and act independently of human knowledge, then scientific realism can be defined as the philosophical thesis that science is the activity of explaining things in themselves and produces partial knowledge of them. And critical realism as a form scientific realism (albeit a highly qualified one), endorses this basic thesis.

[117] DPF, p.15.

[118] See Thomas Nagel, "What Is It Like to Be a Bat?," *The Philosophical Review* 83, no. 4 (October 1974): 435–50.

whole is impossible, and hence absolute knowledge in the sense of infallible and indubitable 'founding blocks' of knowledge of any thing in particular is also a highly 'unrealistic' ideal.[119]

The illicit identification of two distinct categories might be carried out in more than one way. The epistemic fallacy captures the way by which being is reduced to knowledge. Another way is reducing knowledge to being, or conceiving knowledge as naturally given. Bhaskar defines this type of illicit identification as the 'ontic fallacy'. If the identification and critique of the 'epistemic fallacy' have their parallel in Marx and Engels's critiques of philosophical idealism, the identification and critique of the 'ontic fallacy' has its parallel in Marx's analysis of commodity fetishism.

In a section in *Capital* titled 'The Fetishism of the Commodity and Its Secret', Marx analyzes how in the capitalist mode of production commodity exchange, which actually consists of social and historical relations between producers, takes on the appearance of relations between commodities arising in virtue of their objective properties. The real source of the value of a commodity is labour spent in producing it; energy spent by human beings with the purpose of meeting human needs, amongst a myriad of *social* relations that are peculiar to a particular period in *history*.[120]

Let us imagine a market idealized for the purposes at hand in which two commodities that are produced separately and individually, commodity *A* and commodity *B*, are getting exchanged. When an innovation takes place in the production of commodity *A* which reduces the amount of

[119] It is for this reason that Bhaskar explicitly rejects theories of truth as 'correspondence.'

[120] Technically exchange-value is derived from abstract labour, which is human labour as such, stripped of all particularity and specificity except duration. This abstraction renders this labour common to *all* commodities, and this purely social (common) labour in the abstract is what makes commensurable, and thus exchangable, otherwise completely different things such as yarn and flour, which serve different human purposes, meet different human needs and normally require in their production different forms of concrete human labour.

labour necessary to produce an *x* amount of *A*[121], this changes its rate of exchange with *y* amount of commodity *B*[122]. Thus what would be the price of commodity *B* in a non-idealized market changes even though there is nothing common in the production techniques used in producing *A* and *B* that makes the innovation relevant for producing *B*. The rate with which a commodity will be exchanged in a market depends on the conditions of production of other commodities. Furthermore, in a market what ultimately determines the price of a particular commodity produced under concrete conditions in a specific amount of time and intensity of work is the labour *socially* necessary[123] to produce such a commodity, which relates any particular commodity producer to social circumstances of production. If 4 hours of labour in a workplace has been spent to produce a certain amount of commodity *C* while 7 hours of labour has been spent for the same amount in another, if the socially necessary labour to produce that amount is 6 hours, they will both tend to get exchanged in the market by the value of 6 hours. In a real market these relativizing processes and relations take place with the abstraction of labour, mediation of money and in a dynamic combination of multitudinous factors, but the essential relation stands: the stamp of social relations in market exchange holds even when the commodities have been produced individually, and more importantly, the real *relata* are the real producers, and their relations determine the relations that seem to hold between commodities themselves. When exchange is conceived as sustained by a relation between commodities, and not the producers, value turns into something *immediate* to the thing that has been produced and exchanged, and appears as ontologically determined by the *readily given*, as-if-natural qualities of that thing itself. What is really the result of social relations between workers is, by such

[121] 'The introduction of power-looms into England, for example, probably reduced by one half the labour required to convert a given quantity of yarn into woven fabric. In order to do this, the English hand-loom weaver in fact needed the same amount of labour-time as before ; but the product of his individual hour of labour now only represented half an hour of social labour, and consequently fell to one half its former value.' Marx, *Capital, Vol. 1*, 1982, 1:129.

[122] 'The value of a commodity is related to the value of any other commodity as the labour-time necessary for the production of the one is related to the labour-time necessary for the production of the other.' Ibid., p.130.

[123] 'Socially necessary labour-time is the labour-time required to produce any use-value under the conditions of production normal for a given society and with the average degree of skill and intensity of labour prevalent in that society.' Ibid., p.129.

an appearance, naturalized, materialized and decontextualized.[124] A relation between people is thereby transposed into a relation between things, and human agency into powers belonging to things (hence their *fetish* character).

We can now abstract a rough definition of fetishization from Marx's analysis. Fetishization is reification plus illicit power relegation: in the negative moment, the process of dispossession, it consists in illicitly considering something that is the product of social, historical and purposeful human activity as something that is natural, non-social and ahistorical (reification), dispossessing human beings of their agency; and in the positive moment, the process of investment, it ascribes the agency to an illicit source, transferring human powers to things.[125] It is these processes of naturalization, de-socialisation, de-historicisation and de-agentification by which *facts* and *constant-conjunctions* are fetishized in positivist epistemology that the analysis of the ontic fallacy designates.

Ontic fallacy is the thesis that 'knowledge either just is being or is analysable in terms of the being of its objects' (SRHE, p.16). So it can be regarded as the converse of the epistemic fallacy, where it is *being* that can be analysed in terms of knowledge. Just like the epistemic fallacy it is a form of identity-thinking, with the difference that the direction of reduction is inverted: subject is reduced to object, or in broader terms, epistemology is reduced to ontology or knowledge to being. It should be noted here that the irreducibility of knowledge to being does not contradict the ultimate embrace of ontology. Knowledge can and indeed must be categorically placed in being, as must epistemology under ontology; the latter term in each pair encompasses the former by definition. Categorical

[124] 'The mutual relations of the producers, within which the social character of their labour affirms itself, take the form of a social relation between the products. A commodity is therefore a mysterious thing, simply because in it the social character of men's labour appears to them as an objective character stamped upon the product of that labour; because the relation of the producers to the sum total of their own labour is presented to them as a social relation, existing not between themselves, but between the products of their labour.' Marx, 'Capital, Volume One' in Tucker, *The Marx-Engels Reader*, 320.

[125] In this sense it is a form of alienation, and more specifically a form of reification.

embrace does not entail reducibility. Reduction results in the reduced term's losing its distinct reality, whereas categorical embrace allows preserving real difference, in which case it becomes a dialectical subsumption (indeed dialectic could be construed as the very art of preserving differences in such totalities). The non-identity of the kind espoused here of knowledge and its objects specifically requires a two-way irreducibility. It is also worth noting that although these reductions, of being to knowledge and knowledge to being, are distinct, they are often complicit and interrelated.

Within the rubric of the ontic fallacy, knowledge has an *immediately* objective status and it is *directly* determined by its object: it is considered as inscriptions objectively carved upon a contemplating mind by being[126]. What is lost in this reduction is that knowledge is *socially* produced under *historically specific* conditions and objectives in the *purposeful* (and fallible) activity of human beings.[127] The scientists' (a) practical intervention in nature, e.g. experiment-building which involves isolating and artificially triggering causal mechanisms, thereby being able to *produce* constant conjunctions, and (b) theoretical work, e.g. forming hypotheses, designing experiments, building models, constructing theories, making analogies and conceptual analysis, are disregarded. As a result, the conditions under which constant conjunctions are produced (in the activity of scientists) are dispelled from epistemological theory, and these conjunctions are regarded as occurring spontaneously and ubiquitously in nature, giving them a fetish character. If one defines causal laws in terms of constant conjunctions, as empiricists (most notably Hume) tend to do, this

[126] Precursors of a critique of the ontic fallacy can be found (surely among other past critiques of positivism) in *Theses on Feuerbach*, where Marx criticizes a 'contemplative materialism', defined as 'materialism which does not comprehend sensiousness as practival activity' for underplaying the role of human praxis. 'The chief defect of all hitherto existing materialism (that of Feuerbach included) is that the thing, reality, sensuousness, is conceived only in the form of the object or of contemplation, but not as sensuous human activity, practice (...)' *Karl Marx: Selected Writings*, ed. David McLellan (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000), 172–73. If we replace 'sensiousness' with 'knowledge production' we get very close to a critical realist position.

[127] '… the Humean theory presupposes a conception of people as passive sensors of given facts and recorders of their given constant conjunctions.' (RR, p.54)

fetishization is inevitable since if constant conjunctions were to be regarded as artificially produced by the work of scientists in experimental settings, then how could we save causality outside those settings, where constant conjunctions are the exception rather than the norm? But fetishism is not a good solution because it makes it difficult for empiricists to give an account of the intelligibility of scientific experiments, such that if constant conjunctions of events, like the nest of causal laws, obtain anywhere anywhen in nature, why do scientists need to design and conduct experiments to artificially produce specifically conjoined events under conditions of causal isolation in empirically controlled environments?[128]

With the reification of facts, on the other hand, the intelligibility of *change* in science is relegated to whims of nature or being, while the intelligibility of *development* as a more qualified form of change is relegated to pure chance. Facts, which are just the products of social, historical and intentional practice, are stripped of these 'transitive' properties (i.e. properties that settle them into the transitive dimension) and take on the appearance of immediately and objectively given (in the sense of de-subjectivised), eternal natural entities. Among the grave consequences of the ontic fallacy are a disregard for scientific change, and uncritical, dogmatic or absolute faith in the truth of anything established as a scientific fact. Indeed, for a system of thought to qualify as an ideology, it must serve necessary functions of illusion, and the functions positivism serves are 'the transference of certainty to scientific knowledge and identification of its objects as given.'[129]

[128] For expositions of this line of critique, see RTS, chs.2-3, and SRHE, ch.1, secs.4-5. This is not to deny the significance of experience and sense-perception in knowledge, or of constant conjunctions of events in natural science. Being both social products, experiences and constant conjunctions provide the empirical grounds for facts and causal law ascriptions respectively, while the causal laws themselves 'exist and act quite independently of us' (RR, p.55).

[129] SRHE, p.191. For a full analysis and critique of the 'ideological duties' of positivism, see RR, ch.4 and especially SRHE, ch.3.

For Bhaskar facts are *social* things, and they belong to the *transitive dimension.*[130] This is important to mollify the absolute objectivity that is traditionally attached to the concept by positivism, especially what we might call the spontaneous positivism of natural scientists. It is not facts that we discover in nature when we do science. We discover causal mechanisms and laws, which do belong to the intransitive dimension. Our discoveries, made possible by the contemporary advancement of human skill in the form of theory, empirical observation and practical intervention, are rather *facts actualized*. Here facts are defined as '*potentialities* of conceptual schemes or paradigms governing our inquiries, which, when actualized, comprise discoveries'. Facts are 'results to be achieved' and they 'pre-exist their statement'. When we state facts we 'acknowledge results already achieved' in our empirically controlled investigations, 'the result being achieved by *readings*' (SRHE, p.225, original emphasis). Let us put these stipulations in order: our conceptual schemes and scientific paradigms, such as quantum mechanics or the theory of evolution, make possible facts. Facts, being potentialities, exist before any discoveries (which are their actualization) are made, discoveries such as the existence of various subatomic particles constituting matter or transition forms in natural history. By our readings we achieve, state and discover results, and when we state facts we acknowledge these results as achievements or discoveries.

It is also important to note that we do not *make* facts or discoveries in the sense that we make decisions or wooden chess sets. Facts are construed by Bhaskar as social institutions, and the generalizations of the t*ransformational model of social activity* apply. Facts are not arbitrary constructs or *ex nihilo* creations of agents, nor do they determine and constitute agents *in toto*. Facts, like all social structures, exist solely in virtue of the intentional activity of agents, such that if no one were to do science or engage in factual discourse, facts would rapidly peter out. But as any intentional activity presupposes and requires social structures, scientific activity and factual

[130] 'In saying that an account of facts is "reified" I am not simply saying that in it facts are regarded as things. For indeed facts are things, but they are social not natural things, belonging to the transitive world of science, not the intransitive world of nature.' (RR, p.58).

discourse on the part of any agent presuppose, require and are conditioned by prior facts, organizations, languages, social constructs etc. Agents can only reproduce or transform social structures, and such transformational activity is always activity on the existing social structural material they have. The discovery of the Higgs Boson would not be possible without quantum mechanical theory (which in its turn would not be possible without Newtonian physics) and the experiments conducted at the Large Hadron Collider built by the European Organization of Nuclear Research (more popularly known as CERN). If someday the existence of the Higgs Boson gets refuted, that too will be in virtue of transformative activity on prior scientific knowledge and a creative utilization of experimental facilities and technology, which all have social structural aspects.

Implications of EF and OF for ethics

What are the consequences of these illicit identifications for ethics? The epistemic fallacy fails to give due regard to the intransitive dimension, neglecting the existential independence of the objects of inquiry and their non-identity with the inquiries and the inquirers, while the ontic fallacy fails to give due regard to the transitive dimension, omitting, in the context of science, the fallible social work of scientists and the phenomenon of change and development in science, and in broader epistemic contexts (for science is not the only epistemically relevant activity), the non-identity of inquiries and inquirers with the objects of inquiry. Identity is constituted by both but in differently polarized ways. Without the existentially independent reality of objects of reference, which the epistemic fallacy denies, truth, including truth about morality, cannot be *grounded*. Subsequently, morality evaporates into arbitrariness entailed by judgmental relativism, and the emptied space *de facto* gets filled by historically contingent instrumentality, marked by conformity to ideological mechanisms, and power relations, causing conceptions of the good to degenerate into conceptions of might. Without human agency, which the ontic fallacy formally denies, morality cannot even become a problem any more than the morality of rocks can become a problem, and since freedom

involves self-emancipation which requires intentional emancipatory activity which in turn requires human agency, freedom cannot be conceived to be possible. But the case is typically not the simple one where people enjoy full actualization of their agentive powers in practice but deny agency in theory. Fetishism and alienation, underpinned by the ontic fallacy, may not only formally deny human agency, but also substantively undermine it, as in the case of commodity fetishism and the alienation of workers from their means of production and immediate products under the capitalist mode of production, where the products of labour come to dominate and subjugate the producers, constraining the material conditions of their agency. As we will see, the ethics of dialectical critical realism is based on a dialectic of truth and freedom, which are also identified as the two foremost norms towards which philosophical practice must be oriented. With the epistemic fallacy truth cannot be grounded, with the ontic fallacy freedom cannot be achieved; these two great pitfalls of western philosophy put at stake the 'supreme good' and the 'highest good' which are moral alethia (based on truth), and eudaimonia (based in freedom) respectively. I will elaborate on this dialectic and these norms and goods in later sections.

Bhaskar had written on the epistemic and ontic fallacies before *Dialectic.* With *Dialectic*, a connected third consequential mistake, denominated as the doctrine of 'ontological monovalence', is introduced. According to this doctrine all being lies in positive existence, so that reality is identified with what there actually is, and accordingly absence is excluded from ontology. As with the previous (epistemic and ontic) fallacies, critical realism is charged with the double task of showing that this is indeed a fallacy and that western philosophy suffers from committing it to the extent that a critique of it is relevant and significant. The radical novelty of *Dialectic* is the thesis that this doctrine is the cradle of primordial shortcomings of western philosophy, especially in conceiving negation and change, which are two essential categories of any dialectical theory. This connects to politics and ethics quickly since, as the argument goes, without absence, negation and change are not possible; without negation and change, emancipatory transformation is not possible;

and because politics and ethics are futile without the possibility of emancipatory transformation, again, the ethico-political dimension is at stake. This of course is not to say hyperbolically that ethics and politics were futile prior to the conceptual interventions of dialectical critical realism. The case put forward is rather that an inadequate notion of absence will, through a series of transfigurations, generate aporias, contradictions and tensions in theories of politics and ethics, and these, to the extent that they inform action, will influence ethico-political practices. So we have several connected theses: (1) Being includes absence (2); an adequate conceptualization of negation and change requires absence to be understood as such; (3) the relation between reality and absence has not adequately been conceptualized by much of western philosophy, hence nor have change and negation been adequately understood; (4) and adequate ethico-political theory requires an adequate understanding of negation and change; (5) hence, lack of an adequate understanding of negation and change creates a host of problems for ethico-political theory and, (6) since practices are (mis)informed by theories, for practice.

Chapter 4: Non-Identity, Negation, Totality and Praxis: MELD and Axiology

Bhaskar's Critique of Ontological Monovalence: Being able to think the 'not'

The first proponent of the doctrine of ontological monovalence (sometimes OM from now on) in the Western philosophical canon is of course Parmenides. The 'founder of metaphysics' as he is sometimes regarded, prohibited talk of 'the not' in his only surviving work, a poem with two parts, the first involving truth and reason, and the second involving opinions and appearances. In the first part of this poem, which is on 'reality', Parmenides stipulates that any reference to 'what is not' is doomed to incoherence, and from this premise he derives, through a deductive argument, a series of metaphysical conclusions about the real structure of the world. This world reached via rational argument is in many ways different from the world as perceived by human beings, which constitutes the topic of the second part of his poem, 'the opinions of mortals'. The world at which we arrive at the end of rational argument is complete and non-changing, it has no beginning and end, it has no gaps and no room for difference. A tightly packed, absolutely full, purely positive ontology is established by just following the logical ramifications of the prohibition of talk of 'the not'. Indeed it is not easy to dispute the *validity* of Parmenides' argument (as opposed to its *soundness*). Without reference to 'the not', we do reach a description of ontology in which it is extremely difficult to account for change, which is one of the substantial points in *Dialectic*: absence is key to understanding dialectic and change. In this way, Parmenides is an excellent advisory for Bhaskar, because as a champion of the doctrine of ontological monovalence, he had already done much of the transcendental work, which normally takes the form 'What must the world be like for x to be the case?', or, '…for a feature or aspect of human experience, to be true?' For Parmenides, this was substantiated as the question, if the world is intelligible and rational, and if 'talk of the not' is not intelligible and rational, how must the world be structured? Note that there is an element of the epistemic fallacy here as well, because Parmenides made the world succumb to what he considered to be rational. Reason would not yield to the world; the world had to be rational.

But this is a category mistake, as nature is not rational nor irrational but *non-rational*. Natural necessity is a *contingent* feature of being as such and is based in the intransitive dimension, and it is categorically different from logical necessity, which is a conditional feature of a specific form of cognitive activity by human beings and is based in the transitive dimension. Forcing the anthropological cognitive category into the whole of nature is a form of analyzing being, or ontology, in terms of a feature of epistemology. This is a good place to also note that the epistemic fallacy is a species of the 'anthropic fallacy', the analysis of being in terms of some attributes of human being (ECS, p.132), in this case this attribute is of course rationality. And this is *irrational*, since rationality in part lies in understanding the true nature of things, including essences and necessary connections, and adapting oneself to them. Much of rationality consists in comprehending, appreciating, respecting and creatively finding one's way in and around non-rationality.

Once the premise of the incoherence of reference to 'the not' is accepted, a purely positive ontology follows. And since perception is secondary to reason, Parmenides, faced with the empirical actuality of change in the world around him, had to throw away all opinions based on perception, regarding them as illusions. This was the price to be paid to hold on to the conclusions he had reached by way of reason. Reason compels us to hold that there is no room for the not in reality, and change, which presupposes the not, although a prevalent feature of our experience, has to be illusory.

Plato was not willing to pay such a big price. We can gather from Plato's favourable treatment of Parmenides in his dialogues that he regarded Parmenides highly. He has a lengthy dialogue named after Parmenides, in which Parmenides features as one of the very few philosophers other than Socrates who feature as the main interlocutor in his dialogues. It is the fictional Parmenides who was up to the task of posing the most serious intellectual challenge to Plato's own theories in his corpus, critically scrutinizing his theory of forms. There seems to be a reversal of the most common

roles Socrates and his interlocutors play in this dialogue: Parmenides rises up to the task of dialectically examining a bright but young Socrates's ideas by a 'Socratic' inquiry. Arguably a Parmenidean in many respects, Plato does approach 'change' rather sceptically. His homage to Parmenides does not allow him to embrace it completely, but he does not go as far as dismissing it as wholly illusionary either. The compromise he makes is holding on to the notion of change with the caveat of analyzing it in terms of *difference*. This is a shrewd attempt to solve the problem: it avows the actuality of change without any reference to negativity, complying with the Parmenidean injunction to the extent that the overwhelming empirical evidence for change permits. But it is also effectively a reduction. It amounts to denying change in its processual, transformative, negating aspects, which are essential features of change. This is the very brief outline of Bhaskar's critique of Parmenides and Plato's theories of change, which I am going to develop through his treatments of absence, negativity, difference and change.

Absence and Negation

Absence is at the heart of Bhaskar's understanding of negation and change. He distinguishes between three forms of negation: real, transformative and radical. *Real negation* is the most general category for negation, encompassing the other two, and it is based on absence proper. Defined as 'real determinate absence or non-being', it can indicate absence as simple non-existence or 'absenting' as a process. *Transformative negation* is a species of real negation, and as befits the name, is negation under the aspect of transformation, its emphasis being processuality.[131] This distinct category leaves room for non-transformative sheer absence to have its causal place in the world. The status of 'reality' (as being real) is not only ascribed to transformative change. The distinction between non-transformative real determinate absence and transformative negation might

[131] This does not mean its sole mode is process. In Bhaskarian dialectic, all these forms of negation nevertheless can be considered under the aspects of product, process, product-in-process or process-in-product. Bhaskar names this the 'fourfold polysemy of absence.' (DPF, p.185)

be seen as roughly paralleling that between the domains of the real and the actual, but although the similarity is obvious, there is no direct fit between these categories. In basic critical realism, a power might be 'possessed unexercised, exercised unactualised, and actualised undetected or unperceived by human beings' (ECS, p.46), where 'actualisation' refers to a power carrying through its full effect to the conclusion it tends to cause. An example of actualisation in this sense is the falling down of an apple to the ground: in the case of the apple that still hangs on to the branch of the tree, the force of gravity is exercising its power just the same, but is not actualised. The basic critical realist notion of 'domain of the actual' includes 'powers exercised unactualised' and this is one of the places that Bhaskar's choice of terms might cause some confusion. In any case, the possibility of the 'non-actual real' is ultimately necessary for non-transformative absence to hold sway in reality, the category of absence in the end is the broader category: the absence of an actualisation of possibilities is just in what the non-actual real consists, but absence includes non-possible non-actuals as well as possible ones. Besides, arguably non-transformative absence, that is, sheer non-existence or simple non-being, can have actual effects too, so that it is not stuck, as it were, in the area comprising the difference between the real and the actual.[132] The point here is that real negation does not restrict its concerns to something changing into another, but intends to capture modes such as sheer alterity, space-time distance, non-identity, otherness, not-being-there and being-somewhere-else and void; all closely related to each other.

[132] 'Rom [Harre] argues that absence is basically unnecessary and that everything we can say about absence we can say by using the concept of the possible. We are both modal realists in the sense that we both believe that the possible is ontologically, logically, epistemologically prior to the actual. (…) But I dispute that absence is the same as the possible. My concept of absence is of determinate absence as well as nothingness and this is a very rare concept. Almost always when philosophers from Parmenides on have discussed negativity, they have discussed nothingness, which is, as Rom says, an infinite category, a pretty useless one. (…) My paradigm of absence is a very simple one, it is determinate absence. (…) I am concerned with determinate absence which is exactly on a par with determinate presence, except I would argue that it is ontologically prior. Secondly, absence is not the same concept as the possible because we can of course have absent possibilities, and possible absences, recursively embedded in one another. The concepts are completely different. Although the concept of the absent includes the non-actual possible, the concept of absence is far broader than that of the non-actual (although we both agree on the sense that the non-actual is absent) (…).' (SE, p.107)

Radical negation is in turn a species of transformative negation, and it is *self*-transformative negation, and thus we have *real negation* ≥ *transformative negation* ≥ *radical negation,* such that the overlap of these three forms of negation is not the norm but a special case. One more note on Bhaskar's understanding of negation: although, keeping loyal to its etymology, it is closely connected with negativity[133], in *Dialectic*'s terminology it is also used in the broad causal sense it has in the principle Hegel famously appropriates from Spinoza, *omnis determinatio est negatio,* that is, all determination is negation.[134] In Bhaskar this principle takes the form 'to cause is to change is to negate is to absent' (PE 61), where the sense of 'to change' includes, of course, actively preserving the *status quo* when the state of affairs would otherwise (without the preserving agency) be different.

MELD: 'What is it and what is it good for?'

Bhaskar has a specific way of presenting the core themes of the dialectic *of and in* critical realism, in four degrees which are somewhat arbitrarily named 'first moment (1M)', 'second edge (2E)', 'third level (3L)' and 'fourth dimension (4D)', abbreviated to MELD.[135] It is useful to think of these as a schematic collection of some of the basic concepts and ideas of critical realism, grouped

[133] Bhaskar lists the many senses of the verb 'to negate' with which he will be occupied as follows: ''deny', 'reject', 'contradict', 'oppose', 'exclude', 'marginalize', 'denigrate', 'erase', 'separate', 'split', 'sunder', 'cancel', 'annul', 'destroy', 'criticize' and 'condemn', and (…) their interconnections.' (DPF, p.7).

[134] Research indicates Spinoza himself did not use this exact phrase, despite Hegel's implications that it is a direct quote from Spinoza. (For a discussion of the doctrine's history from Spinoza to Hegel and beyond, see Robert Stern, "'Determination Is Negation': The Adventures of a Doctrine from Spinoza to Hegel to the British Idealists," *Hegel Bulletin* 37, no. 1 (May 2016): 29–52). Bhaskar notes that in Hegel this maxim is adopted in an *inverted* form*:* for Hegel 'negation always leads to a new richer determination' (DPF, p.17). Bhaskar's negation, on the contrary, does not necessarily result in further determination, but allows for simple nullifications, cancellations and other forms of absenting.

[135] Note that while '2E' is '*second* edge', there is not a specifically designated 'first edge', which means that to some degree the 1M or 'first moment' also serves as the 'first edge', or similarly the fourth dimension can also serve as the fourth level, etc. This way of naming and numbering of the degrees suggest that all four components of MELD are to some degree moments, edges, levels and dimensions, drawing a complex picture of metaphors for a conceptual universe.

thematically. The four core themes corresponding to the four degrees of MELD respectively can be designated roughly as *non-identity, negativity, totality* and *agency*. Each of these themes collects a cluster of concepts under its rubric.

Within *non-identity* we have the concepts of intransitivity, referential detachment, reality principle, structure, differentiation, alterity, transfactual efficacy, emergence, openness etc., most of which we recognize from the central theses of basic critical realism. Non-identity conveys the basic realist idea that the objects of science are not identical to the subjects conducting scientific inquiries, nor their concepts, theories and the like, underlining the distinction between the transitive and intransitive dimensions. Critiques of actualism, the anthropic fallacy and the epistemic fallacy belong to this moment.

Within *negativity* we have absence, negation, change, becoming, process, finitude, contradiction, development[136], critique, mediation etc., which together contrive the 'narrowly dialectical moment in [this] four-sided dialectic' (DPF 8). This intends to dynamize our understanding of reality by utilizing dialectical categories, to stress change and becoming as characterizing all reality, and also to locate absence as a key to negation and change. The doctrine most centrally critiqued in this 'edge' is ontological monovalence.

Within *totality* we have reflexivity (described as the 'inwardized form' of totality), constellationality, concrete universality, concrete utopianism, subjectivity and objectivity, holistic causality, internal relationality, intra-activity, entity relationism, autonomy, reason and rationality and the unity of theory and practice. This is the level where everything hangs together as a whole, the level of internal as well as external relations: here things are understood not as atomistically

[136] 'which need not be progressive and may just be regarded as directional change including regression, retrogression and decay, in a thing or kind to at the limit fragmentation, chaos and/or collapse.' (DPF, p.8).

separate but as connected and constituted by their relations. Things connected as such form totalities that are greater than the sum of their parts, and totalities are connected themselves forming even greater totalities and so on. Finally we arrive at an understanding of the universe as an infinite and open totality. The characteristic error located at this level is *ontological extensionalism*, which is, at its base, a denial of internal relations. Having strong connotations of separatism, partialism or externalism, this error hypostatizes things as 'separate', impenetrable blocks of space ('extensions') that stand on their own as units of isolated substances (hence a limited, severed, 'partial' understanding of reality which is on the contrary in fact structured as an open and infinite totality of sub-totalities), only to be 'externally' related.[137] Another concept that is (negatively) important for this level is alienation, the splitting off of the human subject from itself, its products and its environment.

Within *agency* we have transformative activity, human intentional causality, phronesis and praxis. This is the theme for which the transformational model of social activity, and a conception of reasons as causes that I have discussed in the previous chapters are the most relevant. Human agency is firmly placed *inside* the world to function as a measure against structuralist and strong constructivist tendencies that can arise from placing a rift between structures and agents or objects and subjects. It emphasizes the causal powers of human beings, that ideas and the actions they inform matter, and that it is possible to bring significant change to social structures. Most importantly, it invites us to emancipatory praxis. The stress on praxis is so strong that Bhaskar unequivocally differentiates this dimension from a particular mode of thought: '4D consists not in practical reasoning but in (reasonable) practice – not the same thing at all',[138] making it clear that his MELD schema is not just a reflective framework for thought, its realm of reference goes beyond epistemology. It thus serves a dual purpose: on the one hand it humanizes and agentifies the social

[137] Ontological extensionalism is defined in DPF's glossary as 'the division of a totality into discrete, separable, externally related parts, manifest as in, for example, the extrusion of thought, or contradiction, or morality, from reality—for instance, in the fact/value divide.' (p.374)
[138] DPF, p.12.

world, defending the causal relevance of intentionality, ideas, beliefs, wants, motivations, etc., giving a full appreciation of the ideational aspect of human agency and its place in social life (and the physical realm) and on the other hand, it espouses a materialist principle, at least in the Marxian sense of the term, upholding the *primacy of practice* of over theory.[139] The resolution of social contradictions in the form of injustice, inequity, unsustainability etc. does not lie in transforming the beliefs of suffering social agents such that they no longer believe that the states of affairs are contradictory (which is how ideologies operate), but in the transformation of the social structures that cause them, which typically have material aspects to them that cannot be altered by mere thought. This sort of structural transformation can be effected only in praxis, not in theory alone. It typically requires, in its turn, significant change in the beliefs of agents, but this latter theoretical transformation is directed precisely towards identifying the contradictions as what they are (i.e. first, as indeed contradictions, and second, as contradictions that do not only exist in thought, as not only ideational or theoretical) and conditions of the contradictions as social-ontological. Reconstructing these conditions in thought as natural (what Marx criticized in *Capital* as fetishism) or perfectly rational amounts *in practice* to a denial and reproduces the conditions and hence the contradictions.[140] Of course social structures cannot be separated from the conceptualizations of the agents who reproduce them, nor can a transformation in practice from a transformation in theory. The priority given to practice does not undermine the significance of theory and vice versa. Elsewhere Bhaskar has talked about the quasi-propositional character of practice, and the practical character of all theory construction.

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[139] 'There is no 4D in Hegel, rather the transfiguration of actuality in the post-philosophical reconciliation. … If reality is out of kilter with the notion of it, it is reality which should be adjusted, not its truth. The unity (or coherence) of theory and practice must be achieved in practice. Otherwise the result is not autonomy, but heteronomy (…). Even the thought of the unity of theory and practice (in theory or practice) must be achieved in practice.' (DPF, p.24).

[140] The distinction between Left and Right (respectively known also as 'Young' and 'Old') Hegelianism was historically based on interpretations of Hegel's thought on religious matters, but a 'right' Hegelianism more true to the name consists in such *rationalization* (to borrow a term from Freud) of social states of affairs.

There is no denying that MELD is an ideational scheme, but it is not a categorical overreach either to stipulate that MELD's reference frame is not limited to epistemology. Differentiating thought and being, as critical realism does, using 1M ideas and concepts, is in and of itself saying something about the non-ideational aspects of being as well as its ideational aspects, extending into non-epistemological terrain within ontology. Differentiating epistemology from ontology is an ontological business. *Non-identity* of 1M, for example, is not just a heuristic, or a second-order cognitive scheme prescribing adequate forms of reasoning: it refers to, and aspires to describe, albeit on a very abstract level, the way things really are in the world. But 4D is nevertheless unique among degrees of MELD in its relation to practice.[141]

These four degrees (MELD as a whole) represent at once both the dialecticisation that critical realism has gone through, that is, the dialectic at work *in* critical realism, depicting its own transformation as it has developed as a body of thought, on the one hand; and on the other, the kind of dialectic it espouses and holds as a standard for an adequate interpretation of reality, that is, the dialectic *of* critical realism. Basic critical realism rested on the critique of both Kantian idealism and Humean empiricism, and it is deepened with a dialecticisation that is carried on through a likewise detailed critique of Parmenidean metaphysics (marred by ontological monovalence) and Hegelian dialectic (marred by the identity of thought and being in thought).

[141] One could argue, perhaps in the vein of absolute idealism, that differentiating thought and being is itself a categorical overreach. This would bring us back to the basic critical realist vindication of ontology: it is not only possible to do ontology in philosophy, but it is also necessary in the sense that if a philosophy does not have an explicit ontology, it will secrete one implicitly anyway. For arguments in favor of this vindication, see ECS, chs.1.3 and 2.1-2.3.

MELD as the 'Ontological-Axiological Chain': An analysis of the peculiar use of the concept of axiology in Bhaskar

Bringing out in detail MELD's relevance for ethics, which is inseparable from that of the whole of DCR, is among the chief aims I would like to have achieved by the end of this work, but one particular connection that I should mention in this initial presentation of MELD is that it has on a few occasions been described by Bhaskar as the 'ontological-*axiological* chain' (emphasis added). Hartwig has seized upon this description and made it one of the central features of his expositions of the MELD schema and DCR in his magisterial work, *Dictionary of Critical Realism* and in the useful introductions he wrote to the latest editions of Bhaskar's works including SRHE, DPF and PE. In Bhaskar, 'ontological-axiological chain' is used much more rarely and he does not seem to put a lot of weight on it, although we can presume that he did not have any objections to Hartwig's strong emphasis. Hartwig has sometimes referred to MELD also as the 'causal-axiological chain', but this alteration ('ontological' to 'causal') does not appear in Bhaskar's writings. MELD, as the above discussion shows, describes a movement from the first moment of non-identity, the basic critical realist metaphysical ground, to the fourth dimension of transformative activity, that is, agentive practice. Here the notions of agency, practice, praxis and transformative activity form a tight cluster, and the connections within this cluster are relatively clear. But the term 'ontological-axiological chain' indicates that MELD staunchly connects ontology to *axiology,* a concept with which I would like to deal separately.

The term 'axiology' comes from the Greek '*axia'* which means worth or value.[142] Normally meaning 'theory of value' or (alternatively, 'study of worth') in the philosophical canon, it sits in a relatively controversial place in current ethical topography, allowing for a wide range of variations in its demarcations. Axiology might be considered as the branch of ethics that deals with values, but

[142] John Simpson and Edmund Weiner, eds., *The Oxford English Dictionary,* 2nd ed. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1989).

although it certainly includes the study of moral values (rights, virtues etc.), it extends to the analysis of aesthetical (beauty), epistemological (grounding, justifying, assertable etc.) and sometimes religious value or worth, and is traditionally concerned mostly with specifically intrinsic as opposed to instrumental value. So although it essentially deals with matters of goodness, it cannot straightforwardly be confined to ethics. Indeed a case could be made that, if ethics is the study of morality, and morality is the theory-practice ensemble apropos of human goods, if any category is going to be placed under the other, it must be ethics under axiology, as one of its branches or subsets, dealing with values that pertain specifically to human life and activity.[143] But an objection could be raised against strict wall-building or annexation between the categories: any adequate understanding of human goods must take into account goods of all kinds, including non-specifically-human goods, and, especially the nature of 'good' in general, with reference to which we might find the justificatory ground for considering good things as such. In Plato's dialogues, for example, ethical inquiry will often take the inquirers to the nature of '*the* good', harnessed by strong requirements such as completeness, adequacy and universality. And Aristotle, contesting the idea that he believed Plato held, i.e. that 'apart from these many goods there is another which is good in itself and causes the goodness of all these as well'[144], thought that 'good is multifarious, in fact as

[143] One could take morality to be the ensemble, both in theory and practice, of goods, values, duties, norms and virtues pertaining to human beings and their activities, and in turn, take ethics to be the study of morality, which can be carried out by disciplines as diverse as anthropology, sociology, history, psychology, philosophy etc. In the latter case it can be named meta-ethics, the specifically philosophical study of morality (and ethics), dealing with morality and the study of it at a higher level of abstraction. I believe this is a tenable way to both do justice to non-philosophical studies of morality and make sense of the ethics/meta-ethics distinction. However, ethics and meta-ethics are sometimes used interchangeably since meta-ethics *is* ethics -it is just a differentiated, more reflexive form of it- and throughout this work, I have largely used ethics to mean meta-ethics. Moral philosophy, a term that has unfortunately gone out of fashion nowadays in philosophy departments as one of the traditional three divisions of philosophy together with metaphysical and natural philosophy, is synonymous with meta-ethics. It is actually the term that best captures the spirit of critical realist ethics since the divisions between morality, studies of it, and philosophical studies of it is the least sharp in this term. Sometimes the ethics/meta-ethics distinction is taken to sharply differentiate normative and applied ethics from more abstract theorizations of it, which, I will show in subsequent chapters, ultimately rests upon an abstraction from the fact/value distinction. Having a distinct discipline of 'normative ethics' presupposes the intelligibility of an ethics that is not normative. In this form, not only social science but also ethical theories are barred from being normative. The stricter the demarcation, the more practically futile philosophy (and theory in general) becomes, which is an extended form of what Bhaskar has called 'the positivistic illusion': the reduction of philosophy to science conceived as morally neutral (SRHE, p.15).

[144] *Nicomachean Ethics*—1095a26-28, in *The Complete Works of Aristotle*.

many as being'. [145] Thus he searched for universal properties that are both intrinsic and common to particular good things.[146] If ethics cannot do without considerations on such level of generality, that is, if ethics must at least in some measure involve the study of good in the broadest sense, it cannot be confined strictly to the study of a particular domain of goods, i.e. human goods: it is always going to have to move back and forth over boundaries. This tends to dialectically expand the definition of ethics to 'the philosophical study of the good', and converges the terms ethics and axiology together. But I do not propose any identity, since, first of all, etymologically and canonically, the 'human' emphasis cannot be expunged from ethics or morality, which have historically been concerned primarily with human duties, virtues, and rights. And secondly, identifying 'the philosophical study of the good' and 'theory of value' would imply an identity between goods and values which are not the same things. Even if ethics were to be defined as the study of the good in its broadest sense, the intricacies of the difference between 'goods' and 'values' must be addressed before substantiating a full convergence.

Axiology's deployment by Bhaskar is even more susceptible to a terminological dispute. The root of 'value' or 'worth' makes its presence unmistakably felt in the common use of the term in the fields of ethics, aesthetics and epistemology, but this has become somewhat indistinct in Bhaskar's use. He seems to use the term mostly synonymously with 'agency', to the degree that the texts would flow with less conceptual 'friction' if we would simply swap the two words (correspondingly converting 'axiological' to 'agentive' or 'agential')[147]. For instance, the notion of 'axiological

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[145] *Eudemian Ethics*—1217b25-26 in ibid.

[146] The result for Aristotle is that good (*agathon*) is that at which all things aim for the sake of itself, and for persons this is flourishing (*eudaimonia,* translated also as well-being or happiness) which in turn is defined as virtuous activity (*praxis* in accordance with *arete*). Note that considerations regarding the good itself or the good in general is not the same as those of the *summum bonum*, the supreme good.

[147] This usage has also been noted by Hartwig in his *Dictionary* entry for the concept: 'In Bhaskar, axiology is primarily both the theory (in the TD) of agentive (human) agency and that to which the theory refers (in the ID) i.e., agency that is its own reward (intrinsically satisfying or valuable) and efficacious, "concerned

imperative', according to its standard presentation by Bhaskar himself and others including Hartwig (more on this standardization soon), is based on the anthropological observation that human agency is irreducible, that is, it is necessary for human beings to act (where inaction is construed also as a form of action), such that we are spontaneously 'always already acting' beings (SRHE, p.127): 'one can no more abstain from activity than from life' (SRHE, p.21). Sometimes it is 'action' or 'activity' to which the concept seems to pertain. For instance, 'axiological asymmetry' refers to the asymmetry between constraints and opportunities for action: 'the condition that the class of acts we cannot perform is always infinitely greater than the class of those we can' (SRHE, p.95). It occasionally also appears to convey a similar meaning to 'praxeology' or 'practice' (accordingly connecting 'axiological' to 'practical' etc.), such as when 'theory/practice or practice/practice contradictions' are considered as 'quasi-logical contradictions and axiological inconsistencies' (DPF, p.61). And the notion of 'axiological necessities' reads like it is referring to things that have to be confirmed, presupposed or simply performed if certain practices are to be possible, to the effect that they seem to just *be* practical necessities, or, if we go back under the rubric of the notion of 'agency', presuppositions of agency. For example, in Hartwig's words, 'the transitivity of science and the intransitivity of its objects' are the 'cardinal axiological necessities positivism flouts' (SRHE, p.xxxi). What is meant here is that science in its practical activity transcendentally presupposes critical realism.

It is not possible to reproduce all of the textual evidence for Bhaskar's non-standard use of the concept here, but I hope I have at least made a case that (a) his 'axiology' does not connote the same subject-matter of the axiologies of, say, Moore or Brentano that tackle the issues of whether the good can be grasped by anything other than intuition or whether intrinsic value is objective or subjective[148]; and that (b) it is sometimes (I would argue almost exclusively) used interchangeably,

precisely with the absenting of absences" (D: 83) and tendentially productive of the good life for all (…)' Mervyn Hartwig, "Axiology," in *Dictionary*.

[148] Cf. John Findlay, *Axiological Ethics* (London and Basingstoke: Macmillan Education, 1970).

depending on the context, with agency, praxeology and practice. Now to issue a mild *ad hominem* consideration, Bhaskar is normally an extremely precise writer: he is well-trained in the analytical school of thought which was dominant at Oxford University during his education as a PPE and PhD student, and despite being a dialectical thinker, and a critic of contemporary analytic philosophy,[149] his writing style and philosophical method displays some characteristics associated with this tradition that prioritize conceptual analysis, clarity (especially in the sense of non-ambiguity), careful definitions of terms and exact use of words. Indeed his works, especially those up to *East and West*, demonstrate a very high standard of analytical rigour. This calls for a careful consideration of any unconventional treatments of concepts, especially when they seem to run against canonical use. It should be asked then, could there be a philosophical motivation behind, and justification for this non-standard usage? How closely can we treat axiology, without committing categorical mistakes, to agency, praxeology, or practice under varying contexts?

One possible way forward is to assume that Bhaskar has made a terminological error and took the word to be meaning something akin to 'act- or agency-ology', perhaps by confusing its etymological root, viz. Gr. *axios* (worth, value), with that of 'act', 'action' and 'activity', viz. Latin *actus*.[150] Even though I do not think this is likely, I do not find this speculation too uncharitable, and it should in principle be regarded as possible. But even if it were an inaccuracy, it is only a slight one. If we go deep into the etymology, we find that the root of axiology is akin to that of agency (Gr. *agein*), and that the roots of axiology, agency and activity (*axio*, *agere*, *actio*) all grow out of the same stem '*ag*', which connotes 'doing' or 'driving'.[151] So there is an etymological licence, due to this common lineage, for closely connecting the concepts. But secondly and more importantly, there is evidence that the term's sense pertaining to value and worth is known to Bhaskar, as the

[149] See, e.g., PE, ch.9.3.
[150] From the entries for 'Axiom' and 'Action' in T. F. Hoad, ed., *Oxford Concise Dictionary of English Etymology* (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 1996).
[151] '*[A]xios*, worthy, akin to Gr. *agein* (s[tem] *ag*-), to drive, (also) to weigh so much: *axios* represents **agtios*, "that draws or pulls by its weight, pulls its own weight" (Boisacq)' 'Axiom' in Eric Partridge, *Origins: A Short Etymological Dictionary of Modern English* (London and New York: Routledge, 2006).

following discussion will show. I will argue that Bhaskar has, over time, come to use the term axiology as a combination of evaluative judgement and agency, the emphasis moving from the former to the latter over time. Similar to the way that 'praxis' has been an ensemble of practice and theory, or more specifically, the practical application of a theory in the Marxist canon, axiology is agency and evaluation held together. In other words, axiology roughly stands to agency and ethics as praxis stands to practice and theory. The difference is that in praxis, the emphasis is on practice, the etymologically dominant term, while in Bhaskar's deployment, the emphasis seems to have shifted over to agency even though the etymology stands (mostly) on the ethical concept. In the case of 'axiological imperative', I will argue that we need two separate ideas for the (a) necessity to judge evaluatively and (b) the necessity to act, and that the notion was intended to capture the former type of necessity when it was originated but has over time been dispatched over to the second.

In Bhaskar's corpus the meaning of the 'axiological imperative', as we have seen, has been standardized as [152]'the necessity to act'. But the concept's history in his writings shows that in the beginning its meaning was different in an important way. 'Axiological necessity' was first presented in *The Possibility of Naturalism,* in a section where Bhaskar tries to establish that *reasons* of agents, which can be roughly analysed into beliefs and wants, can and must be understood as *causes* when the agent acts. This has the important feature of resting on '*appraisals'*, according to certain criteria, of reasons (when considered as beliefs) for acting:

> (…) in contradistinction from other causes, we *appraise* reasons *qua* beliefs for consistency, truth, coherence, etc. And we appraise them in particular from a certain standpoint, necessitated by the irreducibility of intentionality—that of their suitability for believing (accepting) and acting upon. I shall call this standpoint that of the *axiological imperative*. Such appraisals of beliefs are necessitated by the condition that what I am to do can never be reduced to, or discovered by scrutiny of the antecedents of, what I will do. (PON, p.96)

[152] Or, as in this passage from the PE, simply the 'imperative to act': 'When do problems arise? Typically, when we are stuck; when we do not know how to go on. Problems matter; when we need to go on – when we are faced with the imperative to act (the "axiological imperative")' (p.7).

Note that these criteria (consistency, truth, coherence etc.) are all epistemic *values*, and let us remember that axiology does not exclude epistemology. We are now properly in the domain of values. What the agent does when he or she 'appraises' beliefs is an *evaluation* of them, hence the 'axiological', and these appraisals are 'necessitated', hence the 'imperative'.

The last sentence in the quote is the common-sense observation of life that human beings normally have more than one course of action they can take, so taking action normally requires a *choice*, which is one feature among others that distinguishes intentional action from the causality of non-sentient substances. Let us reflect on this distinction for a bit. Addressing the question of animal agency exceeds the limits of this work, but since the specificity of agency as it stands to other forms of causation is of importance to critical realism and ethics, let me state my position briefly. If we adopt the baseline definition of agency as human causation, i.e. causation where the cause is a human, the question does not even arise. But if agency is defined as intentional causation, which includes senses of being objective-driven and goal-oriented and choosing and acting according to one's ends and purposes, then I see no reason to exclude all non-human sentient animals from the category. It should nevertheless be admitted that in animal agency the levels of complexity and rationality of intentionality is lower than those in human agency due in part to a lack of depth in reflexivity, a certain level of which might just be among the *differentia specifica* of human animals. These result in the fact that human beings have the greatest *agentive* powers in the animal kingdom, an evidence of which is simply the worldwide dominance of the human species. This responsibility is one reason environmental concern is a tenet of human morality. It is also among the reasons that even if the broadest conception of ethics as the study of the good (as opposed to the study of good human conduct) were to be adopted, ethics of human virtues, duties and rights would justifiably (non-arbitrarily) still be of utmost significance. A different but closely related reason is of course that ethics is done exclusively by humans for an exclusively human audience: doing ethics is

possible only in virtue of certain levels of complexity of intentionality and depth of reflexivity. But once such levels have *contingently* emerged, it is also *necessary*. In this sense, although agency might be granted to non-human animals, the applicability of the axiological imperative to them is as limited as their powers of intentionality and reflexivity. This is one place where the distinction between the necessity to act and the necessity to judge evaluatively becomes significant. Bhaskar seems not to distinguish between intentionality and reflexivity, and accommodates the former in the latter.[153] This second distinction is not necessary for the purposes of arguing for the irreducibility of mind to body and analysing reasons as causes, which were the chief intellectual ambitions of PON. For that, transcendentally proceeding from the possibility of agency by differentiating intentional from non-intentional activity is sufficient. However, conflating intentionality and reflexivity loses, besides a lot of analytical nuances, a significant difference between non-animal beings and non-human animals, a loss that cannot be afforded by any adequate ecologically sensitive ethics.

A consequence of the axiological imperative is that morality is inexorable and pervasive in all human activity, and in this sense, the unexamined life is not only not worth living, as Socrates has beautifully put it,[154] but it also means a life unlived. Agential acts cannot be analysed away into what priorly happened *to* the agent as though we are analysing the trajectories of colliding billiard balls, since not only passive properties or liabilities of the agent (in the case of billiard balls, for instance, weight), but also the exercise of the *powers inherent* to the agent must come into play. In this sense, agency cannot exist if powers are reduced to liabilities. And the analysis of the actualized choice (the resultant action) cannot only be based on the previous actions of the agent as though we

[153] 'Human action is characterized by the striking phenomenon of intentionality. This seems to depend upon the feature that persons are material things with a degree of neurophysiological complexity which enables them not just, like the other higher-order animals, to initiate changes in a purposeful way, to monitor and control their performances, but to monitor the monitoring of these performances and to be capable of a commentary upon them. This capacity for second-order monitoring also makes possible a retrospective commentary upon actions, which gives a person's account of his or her own behaviour a special status, which is acknowledged in the best practice of all the psychological sciences.' (PON, p.38).

[154] *Apology* 38a.

are analysing the falling of domino stones placed in a single line.[155] The analysis must include the paths that have not been trodden and why they were eliminated by the agent. This is why reason explanations are not only possible but necessary for analysing human activity. Reasons are irreducible portions of what turns a wide range of possibilities into the manifest actuality, they are the 'surplus' of human causality over and above the causality ruling the billiard ball or the domino stone.[156] The action taken when there are no alternatives cannot be properly called an exercise of agency, since in that case it is going to be forced, as in chess when there is only one legal move to make, moves even the chess pieces could themselves make if they could walk. If action is to be agentive, that is, if human activity is to be *intentional*, human beings need alternatives, and for that, the domain of possibilities must be greater than the domain of the actual. Following this, if it is conceded that as a contingent fact of anthropology human beings are necessarily always already acting indeed (say, as opposed to chess pieces), and that human activity, in its agentive form, requires intentionality and the possibility of doing other-wise, such that some choice is normally involved, it follows that *agency requires axiology,* and morality is prevalent and deep-seated to the extent that agency is. This is not an argument for individualism and voluntarism: agents do not enjoy absolute freedom in either their reason-formations (omniscience) or actions (omnipotence). Social structures through ideological mechanisms might have, to a limited extent, the feature of being 'cunning' (in Hegel's use of the concept). The reasonings, judgements and choices of individual agents might be vulnerable to the effects of the operation of reproductive mechanisms of social formations such as the 'ideological apparatuses of the state' in Althusser's terminology. Indeed, it is through the reasonings of agents that ideologies exist. According to the transformational model of social activity, human action often involves unconscious motivations and unintended consequences, and in 'normal', non-transformative periods, agents through their

[155] An actualist error to which behaviourist psychology is prone.

[156] This of course requires an admission of free will against incompatibilist determinism. For a detailed discussion and defence of critical realist positions in a causal powers-based account, see Ruth Groff, "Sublating the Free Will Problematic: Powers, Agency and Causal Determination," *Synthese* 196, no. 1 (2019): 179–200.

activities reproduce social structures. But to the extent that agency is real, agents always have the *power* to do otherwise, that is, to *transform* social structures. The notion of the axiological imperative does not entail the omniscience of the individual: it does not bestow upon the individual the status of a fully informed rational actor, as liberal theories of action often do. Reasons, including appraisals (the axiological moment), can be, and arguably often are, unconscious, and have an inherent *social* character. 'Examination' is 'worthy' because it makes them more and more conscious and subject to rational control. They are often saturated in ideology. But the axiological imperative does acknowledge that people, as much as they are agents, have an irreducible level of freedom. This is just to say that morality exists and it is pervasive, and morality cannot be possible without any level of freedom. It is anthropologically as deep-seated as agency and free will.

So what the axiological imperative decrees is an assessment of the worth of reasons for acting. This has somewhat evanesced in later definitions and deployments of the concept which have transmuted into the necessity to act rather than to evaluate, and an important detail has become clouded: acting and evaluating what course of action to take are not the same things. And even though appraising reasons to act is itself a form of action (trying to choose between the chess moves rook to e1 or knight to f3), it is not the same action the reasons of which are being evaluated (playing knight to f3), so the distinction remains. Appraising, that is, assessing the value of or judging the worth of something, is a *specific* form of action. In Bhaskar's original presentation of the concept, then, as the above quote from PON indicates, the emphasis seems to be on the anthropological necessity of appraisal rather than action in general. The necessity to act binds non-human animals as well as human beings, and in humans it is both ontogenetically and phylogenetically prior to the necessity to make evaluative judgements. Action is a more basic and broader category than evaluation and judgement, indeed as we have seen it encompasses them. This is perhaps why over time the notion of 'axiological imperative' has fallen back upon the action, activity or agency component. So the critical realist theory of agency presupposes the axiological necessity, and differentiating between

the necessity to act and the necessity the make evaluative judgements is useful in various respects (as in matters of environmental and animal ethics). I propose the first to be named ‘agentive necessity’ and the latter ‘axiological necessity’. But this is not the end to a critical realist analysis of activity.

Three things of ethical importance: the values that are invoked in the original description, ‘coherence, truth, consistency, etc.’ are all epistemic. This is a natural consequence of the analysis that here it is *beliefs,* an epistemological category, that the agent appraises. And he or she does that according to their ‘suitability for believing (accepting) and acting upon’. There is a Platonic element here: axiological imperative is analysed as epistemic judgement, just as the Socrates of Plato transposes moral matters into matters of truth and knowledge. And there is also, and not independently of that element, the appearance of a threat of logical positivism: is morality being reduced to epistemology? When we engage in moral reasoning, we normally refer to a wider pool of values, including but not limited to epistemic values. Can moral questions, e.g. ‘Is it wrong to offer a draw in a chess game when you know you are in a losing position?’ be transposed into epistemic questions, e.g. ‘*Is it true* that it is wrong to offer a draw … ?’, or ‘Is the belief that “it’s wrong to offer a draw in a chess game when you know you are in a losing position” suitable for accepting and acting upon’) without loss? Invoking a realist notion of truth, we can tell immediately that the questions of the kind ‘Is that an olive tree?’ and ‘Is it true that that is an olive tree?’, though not identical, have a common ground: the ontological statuses of the said tree. We have seen before that epistemology and ontology are not separate continents sitting next to each other, but that ontology is all-inclusive. So the transposition to the ‘is it true?’ type does give an ‘epistemological’ bent to the matter, but does not undermine with the ontological standing of it. The analysis of reasons into beliefs and wants would reduce ontology to epistemology and commit the epistemic fallacy only if the questions of the sort we are dealing with would be transposed to questions like ‘*how can I know* that the tree is an olive tree?’

Chapter 5: The Rational Kernel of Dialectic: Epistemic Development and Expanding Totalities

In an innocent-looking section that's only slightly longer than one page, Bhaskar makes some important remarks that will be clues to our understanding of the development of critical realist ethics, including the ethical surplus of *Dialectic* over what he would later call the 'proto-ethics'[157] of the theory of explanatory critique. One of these is that he wishes to derive transcendental realism without recourse to science, the significance of which I will try to make clear in the following sections. Another is an open commitment to *moral realism* for the first time in his published writings. The last is his placing of aesthetics inside 'practical philosophy, the art of living well.' For Aristotle, moral virtue is what makes a life lived well and living well consists in the exercise of moral virtues. Speaking in this eudaimonian vein, as Bhaskar presumably did so, aesthetics is an essential part of ethics.[158] This is a cue for appreciating the role of pleasure in the ethical life, and a precaution against rationalist understandings of eudaimonia that reduce the ethical life to a life of theoretical contemplation, as some interpretations (arguably, *mis*-interpretations) of Aristotle allow.

Hegelian Dialectic

Dialectical thought, of course, did not start and end with Hegel. If one of the aims of transcendental realism is to rescue transcendental method from the monopoly of Kantian thought (and more generally idealism), one of the aims of *Dialectic* is to rescue dialectical thought from the monopoly

[157] ONN, p. 56. In the book, the text says 'theory of dialectical critique as a sort of proto-ethics' but this is a transcription error. ONN is a collection of transcriptions of Bhaskar's video lectures recorded at the Institute of Education, University College London. The sound quality of the recordings is low, but it can still be clearly heard that in the original video-lecture Bhaskar says 'theory of explanatory critique'. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=NBJ_bKllBmY (2:20-2:40). But this is not to say that *Dialectic* is a fully articulated ethics. It certainly is not, but it does have the blueprints for a wider and deeper ethics than that of the theory of explanatory critiques, and one of my goals in this thesis is to bring it out and develop it.

[158] This is not to say that it is subsumable under it.

of Hegelian thought.[159] The former monopoly was considerably more powerful than the latter, owing to the efforts of the Marxist tradition to develop a materialist dialectic, which was moderately successful in breaking Hegel's monopoly. As Marx famously put it in metaphorical language,

> 'the mystification which the dialectic suffers in Hegel's hands by no means prevents him from being the first to present its general forms of motion in a comprehensive and conscious manner. With him it is standing on its head. It must be inverted, in order to discover the rational kernel within the mystical shell' (*Capital*, Volume I, p.103).

We can interpret the first line metaphors, i.e. standing on the head and inversion, as referring to Hegel's absolute idealist metaphysics underpinning his dialectic through which the identity of being and thought in thought is achieved. The philosophical motivation behind invoking the metaphor of inversion is surely a materialization of dialectic: it is for *grounding* dialectics in *being*, the latter construed not absolutely or necessarily as ideational or rational (nor as completely non-ideational or irrational), and even more specifically, grounding dialectics in the material conditions and practical forces of history and society, including but not limited to the human condition and human agency, all bound by the constraints of nature. Only on such a materialistically reinforced, realistically consolidated ground can dialectic, to continue with the metaphor, stand on its feet.[160] This materialistic motivation is taken up and arguably carried forward by Bhaskar, but how coherent this critique and grounding is with a systemic 'inversion', strictly understood, of Hegelian dialectic is still open to question. We will see that Bhaskar has important differences from Engels in this matter.

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[159] '…dialectical arguments are a perfectly proper species of transcendental argument belonging to the wider genus of retroductive (ascending) – explanatory (descending) argumentation in science. Dialectical arguments (and, for instance, the ontological necessities and contingencies they can establish) are no more the privilege of absolute idealism than transcendental arguments are the prerogative of Kant.' (DPF, p.24).

[160] 'Thus one can write, within a materialist context, of the constellational identity of being and thought in the sense that thought is both (a) within being, but (b) over-reached by being, as (c) an emergent product of being.' Note that here 'constellational identity … is essentially a figure of *containment* (in the sense of being a part of)' (DPF, p.106).

The other couple of metaphors entails a closer, more immediate contact with the notion of dialectic: just what is the *rational kernel* of dialectic, and how can it be demystified? The inversion metaphor has its limits since it rather revolves *around* dialectic rather than dealing with it directly. It is about taking dialectic and putting it into its proper place, providing it with the right ontological context. A jar sitting upside down might be a perfectly fine jar, and inverting it is hardly a straight, outright transformation of the jar itself. So we could ask, what more is required than an inversion for demystifying and bringing out what is rational about dialectic? Most of the vast literature on this matter in the Marxist canon focuses on Marx's relation to dialectic, the extent of its presence in his works (or complete lack thereof), whether it is just a method or a full-blown ontological system, and its significance for Marxism more broadly conceived. We see in Althusser's *For Marx* an outright rejection of Hegelian dialectic, but his critique is not *immanent* in character, and we see in Marcuse's *Reason and Revolution* a much more direct engagement with Hegel's works but not so much a *critique*. Bhaskar's *Dialectic* is one of the few works written within the contours of Marxist literature that takes on Hegelian dialectic on its own terms, tries to produce an immanent critique of it, and constructs a generalized presentation of its 'rational kernel' without limiting its context solely to Marx's works, like much of the Western literature does. And on the other hand, in doing so, it does not over-expand dialectic into a universally applicable philosophy of everything, as the dialectical materialism of Soviet Marxism, mainly originating from Engels's expositions, has tended to do.[161] Its first chapter is devoted chiefly to an analysis of Hegel's dialectic, a realist extraction of dialectic proper, which is Bhaskar's own attempt for demystifying the rational kernel, and an immanent critique of Hegel. The first and last of these I will not discuss here, but a brief discussion of the second, that is, Bhaskar's interpretation of the 'rational kernel', is necessary to understand Bhaskar's project.

[161] It remains open to debate whether *Dialectic* is a Marxist work, but I would argue it is written from a Marxian perspective – by which I mean a perspective that is heavily informed by and accepts the main tenets of historical materialism, Marx's critique of the capitalist mode of production, and socialist utopian ideas.

But let us start with Hegel, specifically his characteristic movement from the understanding (*verstand*) to speculative reason (*vernunft*). For Hegel, understanding, like common sense dominating our daily considerations, is the pre-dialectical thought that takes things as fixed, isolated and finite, as distinctly identical only with themselves and in plain opposition to other things. In the world of the understanding, things are tidy and clear-cut, and order is in place. This he takes to be usually sufficient for science to successfully operate. Reason, on the other hand, is the home of speculative thought that produces dialectical knowledge by taking things as changing, transitive, passing out of themselves and into each other and interconnected with other things (which the understanding would take them to be in opposition with), forming a totality of internally related entities.[162] Bhaskar calls this movement from the former to the latter the 'U-D-R' schema of dialectic. According to this schema anomalies and contradictions emerge in (U)nderstanding and are resolved through a negative (D)ialectical process, acting as the 'great loosener' of firm boundaries, which takes us to speculative (R)eason, where the previously contradicting terms are now successfully contained without contradiction. [163] Dialectic can of course refer not only to the middle stage but to the schema as a whole, including the stages of understanding and reason. The

[162] In Hegel's words, 'The dogmatism of the metaphysics of the understanding consists in holding on to one-sided thought-determinations in their isolation, whereas the idealism of the speculative philosophy, by contrast, has the principle of totality and shows itself to reach beyond the one-sidedness of the abstract determinations of the understanding.' (*Encyclopedia of the Philosophical Sciences in Basic Outline Part I: Science of Logic*, trans. Brinkmann and Dahlstrrom, Cambridge University Press 2010, p. 72). Bear in mind that any short formulation of Hegelian dialectic is bound to be rough and sketchy, and does not do justice to the complexity of his system. As Bhaskar says, 'No attempt to fit Hegelian dialectics into a unitary mode will work – although the Being-Nothing-Becoming and Unity - Difference - Unity-in-Difference heuristics can illuminate'. (DPF, p.27)

[163] Cf. Hegel's own introduction of his logic in the *Encyclopaedia*: 'In terms of form, the logical domain has three sides: (α) the abstract side or that of the understanding, (β) the dialectical or negatively rational side, (γ) the speculative or positively rational side. These three sides do not constitute three parts of logic, but are moments of every properly logical content, that is to say, of every concept or everything true in general. … (α) Thinking as understanding does not budge beyond the firm determinateness [of what is entertained] and its distinctness over against others. A limited abstraction of this sort counts for it as self-standing and [as having] being. … (β) The dialectical moment is the self-sublation of such finite determinations by themselves and their transition into their opposites. … (γ) The speculative or the positively rational grasps the unity of the determinations in their opposition, the affirmative that is contained in their dissolution and their passing over into something else.' G. W. F. Hegel, *Encyclopedia of the Philosophical Sciences in Basic Outline. Part 1: Science of Logic*, ed. Klaus Brinkmann and Daniel O. Dahlstrom (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 125–32.

typical mode of operation of the dialectical moment narrowly conceived is 'sublation' (*Aufhebung*, literally meaning 'taking away' or 'denying' and 'lifting up' or 'elevating', a polysemy which Hegel exploits skilfully), such that within the U-D-R movement to a resolution, the contradicting terms and the contradiction are sublated. As a Hegelian term of art this refers to the act of both preserving and negating something at once, as opposed to simply cancelling, excluding, removing, erasing or undoing. The point is that the negated terms are simply annulled but successfully retained through the restoration of a totality, under the new and more expansive framework of which they no longer appear contradictory.[164]

In Bhaskar's re-presentation, Hegelian dialectic is the process in which more expansive, more inclusive or more coherent totalities are formed through the generation, identification and resolution of a lack, inadequacy or contradiction. Bhaskar argues that although dialectic is not limited to science, this process describes how scientific progress actually unfolds: the epistemological development we observe in science is a paradigm case for Hegelian dialectic. The moment of the 'understanding' can be associated with what Kuhn has called 'normal science', while the dialectical process roughly corresponds to his 'revolutionary science'.[165] Consider a case in natural science, for example, when a 'tension' springs in the form of empirical findings in experiments that cannot be

[164] In Marcuse's description of this process, 'Whereas common sense and the understanding had perceived isolated entities that stood opposed one to the other, reason apprehends "the identity of the opposites." It does not produce the identity by a process of connecting and combining the opposites, but transforms them so that they cease to exist as opposites, although their content is preserved in a higher and more "real" form of being. The process of unifying opposites touches every part of reality and comes to an end only when reason has "organized" the whole so that "every part exists only in relation to the whole," and "every individual entity has meaning and significance only in its relation to the totality"'. Herbert Marcuse, *Reason and Revolution: Hegel and the Rise of Social Theory* (London: Routledge, 1955), 47, quoting one of Hegel's earliest works from 1801, *The Difference Between Fichte's and Schelling's System of Philosophy*.

[165] See Thomas S. Kuhn, *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions* (Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, [1962] 1966). Indeed, important philosophical differences in Kuhn and Bhaskar's ontology put aside, the historical patterns of scientific change portrayed in this work fit nicely into Bhaskar's account here. Note the table of contents: II. The Route to Normal Science, III. The Nature of Normal Science, IV. Normal Science as Puzzle-solving, … VI. Anomaly and the Emergence of Scientific Discoveries, VII. Crisis and Emergence of Scientific Theories, VIII. The Response to Crisis, IX. The Nature and Necessity of Scientific Revolutions, … XII. The Resolutions of Revolutions and XIII. Progress through Revolutions.

accommodated by the existing theory. Under the current state they constitute an anomaly, which can be resolved only when the conceptual field is revised and expanded such that under a new theory, the results can be sensibly explained without causing gaps and inconsistencies (or by causing smaller gaps and less significant inconsistencies), and as such they cease to be anomalies in this later stage. As science keeps progressing and new phenomena are encountered and deeper layers of reality are discovered, new contradictions in the later stage will inevitably arise and another cycle of dialectical resolution will begin. Of course in actuality this process is not linear and straightforward, and this interpretation only intends to describe an undercurrent tendency, but the history of science attests that this tendency is nevertheless real and powerful. Many of the great revolutions and gradual advances in science, such as the development of psychology, Marxist economy, the theory of evolution, Copernican cosmology and Newtonian physics (and then Einsteinian physics) to name a few, can be adapted to this schema. However, Bhaskar is not content with locating themes from Hegelian dialectic in the logic of scientific discovery and development. He wants to deepen dialectic in an ontologically realist way, and to do that he brings in the concepts of levels, structures, stratification and grounding, and refashions the dialectical process accordingly. First, the U-D-R movement is understood in terms of moving from a *level* to a higher one:

> Within any U-D-R movement, the dialectical moment proper reports, and speculative reason remedies, a real negation or absence in the base concept or form at, let us say, Level 1. The dialectical movement to the resolution at Level 2 consists in a transformative negation of a determinate and preservative type (in consciousness or experience of that at Level 1). … It does this [transformative negation] by dialectically bracketing and retaining or incorporating the base concept…; the lack, inadequacy or internal incoherence within the base concept, identified in [Dialectic]; and the tension, inconsistency or contradiction between the [base concept] and what it is meant or trying to be (or implicitly is), identified in the probing comment, and a fortiori the theory/practice inconsistency between the base concept and its comment, in what is in effect a continually unfolding process within a permanent memory store. (DPF, p.21).

And then the concept of structures is brought in:

> The determinate result of this labour of transformative negation (in the transitive process of science) will be the identification of a new level of ontological structure, say S2, described in a new theory T2 capable of explaining most of the significant phenomena explained by T1 (at [the Understanding]) plus the anomalies at [Dialectic], albeit in its own (T2's own) terms. The phenomena at S1 identified by T1 are 'saved' (for the most part)—this is the preservative aspect;

> theory at T1 is negated, falsified (the aspect of indeterminate, excluding negation) and transformed into something that could not be predicted and had to be won, fought for, achieved in a labour culminating in the determinate negation and replacement of T1 by T2. (DPF, p.31)

What is important here is that in the move from one level (L1) to the other (L2) of the dialectic, what justifies putting one theory (T2) on a higher level (L2) than the other theory (T2) in the transitive dimension of science, that is, in the epistemological dialectic, is ultimately its grasp of the deeper ontological structure (S2) (together with S1) in the intransitive dimension. The 'ascending' of epistemological levels in the dialectic is accompanied by the 'descending' of ontological strata, and 'broadening' in reality. The objects of science, i.e. the structures of reality, are themselves stratified (tiered, levelled), and science develops as it probes deeper and spans wider into them. This is how the theories, the theory change and the dialectic are non-arbitrary and *grounded* in a depth-ontology, which is completely lacking in Hegel.

Let us dwell on this notion of 'grounding' for a bit. Ontologically speaking, A is grounded in B if B provides the condition of possibility, causal basis or reason for A; and epistemologically speaking, A is grounded in B if B provides an explanatory account, justification or warrant for A. In other terms, an idea is grounded if there are objective reasons for believing it. In Bhaskar's formulation, 'when we know *why* something is true our assumption *that* it is true is *grounded*, in a way in which it is not when we are only subjectively empirically certain of it.' (DPF 33, original emphasis). Bhaskar focuses on the explanatory criterion (the 'why'), while only hinting at the objectivity criterion here (by contrasting 'grounding' with *subjective* certainty), and in general tends to avoid the terms 'objective' and 'objectivity' in his works, to an extent that creates the impression that it is a deliberate philosophical predilection. Andrew Collier on the other hand openly champions these terms (see especially his *In Defence of Objectivity*). I tend to take sides with Collier on this preference; a defence of objectivity can be considered among the main tenets of realism. The

relevance of this concept for the current discussion is that Bhaskar thinks grounding is what *absence* provides for inconsistencies.

The Relations Between Absence, Incompleteness and Inconsistency

For Bhaskar, dialectic can be understood as the absenting of absences:

> 'The dialectical movement to the resolution at L2 consists in a transformative negation of a determinate and preservative type (in consciousness or experience of that at L1). But … all transformative negations are also real negations (though the converse is not the case). In virtue of what is *this* transformative negation a real negation? It absents the absence in L1. (This is the sense in which determinate negation is the negation of the negation.)' (DPF, p.21).

This move is not obvious but it is not arbitrary either. The transposition of the set of concepts including contradiction, anomaly, aporia, inconsistency etc., which can be collected under the main category of inconsistency, into the notion of absence, and on a parallel, of the concept of resolution of inconsistencies to the notion of absenting absences, requires justification. On one level, this justification is provided by the idea that the inconsistencies in a given system, field, paradigm or more generally, partial totality, which drive the dialectic forward, are generated by its (the system's, field's etc.) *incompleteness*, and their dialectical resolution lies in the transformation of the partial totality into a more *complete* one.[166] It is easier to grasp how incompleteness and partiality can be seen in the light of absences, compared to inconsistency, which is now thus tied to absence by a causal relation, such that absences of the relevant type in totalities *produce* inconsistencies of the

[166] 'What sets the dialectic going is some absence … In science you leave something out of your description of reality. Sooner or later that something you have left out will resurface in your description of reality and take the form of a contradiction. … And what you would have here is an incompleteness generating a contradiction, a dualism, a split, generating further contradictions and splits until these contradictions proliferate to a point of crisis and then the crisis just has to be resolved … by transcendence to a new, more totalising world view. For example, by Newton's discovery of gravity, or Einstein's theory of relativity. They brought something new, de novo, a new concept came in and revolutionised the existing world view and so we move on to a new round of scientific dialectic; perhaps we have discovered a new level of reality, and then the whole process starts again.' Chapter 3 in Roy Bhaskar, *Reflections on MetaReality: Transcendence, Emancipation and Everyday Life* (London: Routledge, 2012).

relevant type. In other terms, inconsistencies are *grounded* in absences. This is the more substantial claim and it avoids arbitrariness in the preference of switching from the talk of contradictions, which is the canonically more recognized 'driving force' of dialectic, into that of absences, by referring to a stratification (that is, by *grounding*). Bhaskar is clear about this and makes the point in every iteration of his theory: it is absence (the most general concept) and incompleteness (a more qualified form of absence) that causes inconsistencies and contradictions in the epistemological dialectic. But this in turn calls for metaphysical elaboration. For instance, why and how does incompleteness generate *contradictions*? A preliminary answer is that, within the context of epistemological dialectic, the absence resides in the epistemic process, but not its ontological counterpart, the object of inquiry. In any particular moment of epistemic inquiry, the absence in the transitive dimension, such as the absence of the concept or the idea of a real relation, mechanism, structure, disposition, power etc., does not exist in the intransitive dimension, here understood as the relation, mechanism, structure, power etc. itself.[167] In semiological terms, the referent is real but its sign is absent. But what we aspire to do in science is explain reality, and we succeed to the extent that our theories describe what is real and why it is so. The objects of our epistemic endeavours are, ultimately, *what they completely and totally are,* even when they are themselves incomplete and only a partial totality or even a negativity or an absence itself; whereas our descriptions of reality are marred by incompleteness and partiality. This is why this sense of absence and incompleteness has a negative connotation within this specific context: a theoretical entity being absent just means it cannot refer to a thing that is real, which is the very task it is supposed to carry out. This is the moment of theory/practice inconsistency within a theory: a theory (or framework) fails to do what it is designed and understands itself to be doing. Take a reduction of the history of humankind to a history of men, omitting the equally important place and role of women, which unfortunately has been the case for the greater part of the history of historiography. Women were always there in

[167] This of course does not mean there cannot be other forms of absences in the intransitive dimension, such as non-epistemic absences. Indeed, in the broad ontology of *Dialectic*, purely positive existence is not possible, and absence and negativity have metaphysical priority over positive being.

reality, but absent in men's accounts of it, which creates lacunae and a wealth of problems in historiography, only to be overcome by the gradual inclusion of women over centuries of feminist struggles, reaching a greater completeness. An absence in theory means the theory fails to appreciate the existence (or absence) of some part or feature of the totality of its object. Why is this a *failure*? Because scientific theories are teleologically loaded: the intention to explain reality is its very *raison d'être*.

But this so far only establishes why it is an inadequacy, a lacking, a deficiency of some sort for some important thing to be absent in theory (that it is a failure to refer to what is real), not why and how it causes problems, anomalies and finally inconsistencies in theory. It might be asked, is it not possible to give a completely consistent but incomplete account of reality? Again, only a preliminary answer could be given here. Perhaps it is indeed possible in principle, but even if it is, such an account could be held for long only under passive and closed conditions, whereas for science there is a tendency at work which would push and pull such an account towards instability and inconstancy, challenging the stagnating conditions. Since as agents we are always causally and constitutionally related to the world and to our objects of epistemic inquiries, such that we are parts of the reality we want to understand and can only live and act inside it, the incompleteness in our understanding of it cannot stay 'safe' in an isolated vacuum for long. Theory cannot stay otiose forever, it is driven towards change(and more specifically, development). Two rudimentary reasons can be given for this. The ontological reason is that reality is an infinite, complex, stratified, differentiated totality of partial totalities (as opposed to a homogenous unity of monist blockism): there is no ultimate object in reality about which we could make an *a priori* claim that its knowledge will be absolutely self-contained, except for perhaps the whole of reality itself. Reality goes deep and wide in all directions with internal and external relations of causation and structuration, and this invokes a directional holistic heuristic in science, such that any knowledge of any particular thing is generally accordingly oriented towards continuous widening and deepening.

And the pragmatic reason is that most theoretical endeavours are practice-oriented and practically imbued: there is no shelter for human beings that can keep them locked away from reality where they can idly incubate their epistemic inquiries.[168] What is real in ontology but absent in our epistemic efforts therefore eventually comes back to 'bite', it makes itself 'present' in the form of problems, anomalies, aporias, contradictions, inconsistencies, and difficulties. To simplify, consider a kid who wants to make a paper aeroplane but has a severely inadequate grasp of aerodynamics, lacking, for example, an understanding of air resistance. This no doubt will cause the design of the paper aeroplane to be faulty, which in turn will cause its trajectory to go awry. Incompleteness generates problems because of the relations between (a) epistemology and ontology and (b) theory and practice (the embedding of the first terms in the second in each couple) both realistically understood, or in other words, because epistemology 'gravitates' towards ontology (that it wants to understand it, it is drawn to it, it 'tends' towards it); reality consists in structures (partial totalities consisting of internal, and connected by external relations) going infinitely deep and wide; and science cannot be isolated from practical engagements.[169] Within the limited context of the epistemological dialectic, epistemological absences are expressions of *absent referents*, and the 'totalitarian' structure of being and the irreducibly constitutive, causal and practical relations

[168] Mathematics and similarly theoretical domains come to mind as exceptions, but an argument could be made, at least genealogically, that even mathematics, although contemporarily a purely deductive and abstract discipline, emerged as an empirically-based attempt to understand the quantitative and spatial properties and relations of natural objects in the face of practical needs and concerns such as those in travel (cartography), agriculture, commerce and production and reproduction in general, and furthermore, whole mathematical continents, such as calculus, were invented to meet the methodical needs of physics. But more importantly, since Gödel's incompleteness theorem we know that formulating a system of axioms that is both consistent and complete at once is not possible, which has the consequence that mathematics is essentially incomplete and such formal systems cannot provide their own consistency from within. This undermined the ideal of self-containment even in purely abstract epistemic contexts, which played a grave role in the demise of the axiomatic research program of logical positivism, and more generally, foundationalism. For philosophical ramifications of Gödel's theorem, see Ernest Nagel and James R. Newman, *Gödel's Proof*, ed. Douglas R. Hofstadter (New York and London: New York University Press, 2001).

[169] Only a philosophical God of monism, enjoying absolute omniscience, *being and knowing* everything at once would not suffer from epistemic absences.

between epistemology and ontology are what ultimately cause these absences to produce the problems, contradictions, inconsistencies that we see in crisis periods of sciences.

In more Bhaskarian terms, as the dialectic unfolds, as we have seen, Theory 1 in the transitive dimension that intends to explain Structure 1 at gets superseded by Theory 2 in virtue of the identification of a new structure, Structure 2 in the intransitive dimension. The aporia that Theory 1 is riddled with is generated by the absence of an adequate account of Structure 2, which was not absent, but a part of the reality that both Theory 1 and Theory 2 are trying to explain. To summarize the argument, then: given that human knowledge is fallible and limited by us being the natural species that we are and the material and cognitive conditions that it brings, and that there is no foreseeable end to the breadth and depth of being understood at large, science and other epistemic inquiries will always include absences. And given that we are parts of the world we wish to understand, or in different terms, that the epistemology is constitutively, causally and practically related to ontology and drawn to it in an open and ongoing way, such that its relations to ontology will continually feed back into it, these absences will breed inconsistencies in our theories.[170] This is what Bhaskar has called the *dialectic of inconsistency and incompleteness*: 'In this dialectic, absences generate relevant incompletenesses, which yield inconsistencies, necessitating completer totalities.' (DPF 77) Since historically focus on consistency of ideas and exactness of definitions deployed within closed formal systems has been the hallmark of analytical (formal-logical) thinking, which dialectical thinking (when absences take the form of relevant incompletenesses)

[170] Cf. Collier's comments on Bhaskar's early theory of truth. In *A Realist Theory of Science*, his first book, Bhaskar writes: 'There is no way in which we can look at the world and then at a sentence and ask whether they fit. There is just the expression (of the world) in speech (or thought).' (RTS, p.249) Collier replies: 'But we do look at the world and then at a sentence (or vice versa) "and ask whether they fit". We say things like: "this place is just as (or not at all how) it was described"; we look to see if the bottle opener is really in the knife drawer as we were told, and so on. It is for just such relations of comparison without resemblance that we need the word "correspondence".).' (*Critical Realism: Introduction to Roy Bhaskar's Philosophy,* pp.241-242.). Here once again I tend to side with Collier regarding Bhaskar's pre-dialectical philosophy. Cf. also Ruth Groff, who also believes realism entails a correspondence theory of truth, and criticizes Bhaskar for not explicitly endorsing some such theory. (Ruth Groff, "Truth," in *Dictionary*).
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calls into question, challenges and 'brackets' during a conceptual expansion process, this is also a dialectic of analytical and dialectical thought. Since it was Gödel who demonstrated that formal systems cannot simultaneously be consistent and complete and require extra-systemic references for their own explanation, and given this generative relation between incompleteness and inconsistency, the epistemological dialectic is sometimes designated as the Hegelian/Gödelian dialectic. Because the universe is an open and 'potentially infinite totality, of which we know something but not how much' (DPF, p.14) and human beings will never reach omniscience, there is no end to epistemological dialectic within the limits of human history.

There are three important things to note here. Firstly, it should be granted that partial knowledges of particular things and partial totalities are possible and actual (it is the knowledge and science we do have and rely on when we take a bus, turn on the lights, make a phone call or use the elevator), and knowledge does not presuppose absolute knowledge of the whole of reality. Knowledge does not have to be general and of the whole, and we can have 'local, sectoral, separate or particular knowledge'.[171] Epistemic endeavours should not be judged under the standards one would expect from an omniscient being. Granting the possibility of partial knowledge is necessary to accept the phenomenon of development in science: our theories do not change, in an all-or-nothing manner, by a cycle of failing at absoluteness and then restarting from scratch every time.

Secondly, we should be careful not to conflate two types of inconsistencies: one is an inconsistency between theory and practice, and the other is within theory only. It is the relation between epistemology and ontology that generates the theory-practice inconsistency, but it is science's open and ongoing processual character that follows' (to its own advantage) these to make way for

[171] Bhaskar in ECS puts some stakes on the possibility of particular knowledge (and that it is not necessary for knowledge to be absolutely general) to argue for a different point, that we can 'talk about the world apart from our ways of knowing them', denial of which is a form of the epistemic fallacy, and that knowledge depends on referential detachment. 'If we are going to have knowledge of particular things or of any discrete subject matter, we must be able to (and regularly do) detach the (ontological) conclusion of some epistemic investigation from the epistemic investigation itself.' (p.26)

theoretical inconsistencies: this is the 'where was I wrong?' moment the aerodynamicist kid has when her paper aeroplane fails to take off successfully. We should be careful not to push the concept of consistency to the point where we commit a category mistake: consistency is not the type of relation that can hold between statements, propositions, theories etc., on the one hand, and reality on the other. A false proposition cannot, in the strict sense, be said to be 'inconsistent with reality'. The claim I assert here is that absences in conceptual structures, due to their relation with reality and human practices, are bound to generate inconsistencies in theory (not between theory and reality). It is the quasi-propositional character of practices and the practical character of theories that make it possible for us to talk about theory-practice inconsistencies, but reality cannot be said to be 'quasi-propositional', and cannot be 'consistent' or 'inconsistent' with thought under the strict logical definition of the term.[172] Having said all this, the realist, I believe, is nevertheless ultimately bound to subscribe to a form of correspondence theory of truth where it is the relation of the thought to reality that makes it true or not, understood either under the metaphorical notion 'correspondence', 'being in/out of kilter with', '(lack of) fit' or some other term such as expressivity-referentiality. The extent to which that relation approaches to, or effectively utilizes a loosened and stretched sense of 'consistency', say, between the imagined reality under the descriptions of theory and reality proper, is a very interesting avenue for theorists of truth to pursue. In a casual sentence that does not seem to carry a lot of stakes, Bhaskar does extend the definition of inconsistency out of its strictly formal-logical zone, without, I would argue, committing a category mistake. In the human sciences and humanities domain, another way to look at the idea that absences in conceptual fields ground inconsistencies, which carry the dialectic onwards, is by a novel conception of theory-practice inconsistencies: this is when an epistemic lack, inadequacy or

[172] The logical definition of consistency I work with here is, borrowing from Wilfrid Hodges, 'the compatibility of beliefs'. 'A set of beliefs is called consistent if these beliefs could all be true together in some possible situation. The set of beliefs is called inconsistent if there is no possible situation in which all the beliefs are true.' Wilfrid Hodges, *Logic* (Penguin Books, 1980), 13. A set of sentences are consistent if there are no sentences that mutually contradict each other. A contradiction arises when the asserted set contains both a proposition and its negation (when *p* and not-*p* are conjoined). Of course in Hegel and Marx, 'contradiction' has senses outside of this logical framework.

incompleteness can be viewed as 'some inconsistency between [the] self-understanding [of the practice of the pre-existing (scientific) community] and the way it is (T/P or practico-epistemological inconsistency or incoherence)'. It is intuitively less problematic to talk of inconsistencies between knowledge and reality in the human domains, especially when reality consists of practices and knowledge. When 'being' can be seen as a practice, i.e. when a practice and its self-consciousness are incoherent, this can be seen as a practico-epistemological inconsistency.

Thirdly, in this depiction of the relation between absence and incompleteness on the one hand and contradiction and inconsistency on the other, I have invoked a static picture of reality for the purpose of convenient exposition, where structures and generative mechanisms are stable, enduring and ever-present. But the spirit of dialectic itself compels me to emphasize that this is the case only for the most part in nature (since mechanisms, structures, essences and powers of natural entities are themselves amenable to change) and very rarely so in the social and personal domains, where substantial change is a much more pervasive feature and frequent occurrence.[173] Bring in the possibility for essential change, for new structures to emerge and existing structures to wither away, and especially in the social domain, admit of the objects of epistemic inquiry to include the inquiry processes and epistemic agents themselves (consider a social scientist studying society, of which ignorance and knowledge and a myriad of related structures and processes –including social science itself– is a constituent part) and the process gets dialecticised even further. However, this further dialecticisation only extends the core process of the epistemological dialectic described here, not renders it irrelevant.

[173] As Bhaskar notes in a different context, 'this is only a 1M resolution – at 2E the course of the deep structure of nature may indeed change' (DPF, p.33).

‘Rational Kernel’, ‘Mystified Shell’ and ‘Inversion’ Metaphors

For the critical realist absolute completeness cannot be reached and inconsistency can never be absolutely resolved, therefore the epistemological dialectic has in principle no end. Of course, for Hegel this is not the case. His absolute idealism has no objections to identity thinking, and his dialectic is therefore finite: it ends where Spirit achieves full self-consciousness which is at once Being’s own coming-to-terms with its self-identity. This is one way Hegel’s system is closed, whereas for Bhaskar, ‘totalities in general are and must be open.’[174] This is the crux of Bhaskar’s objections to Hegel’s dialectic. In Hegel’s dialectic, systemically, change *in principle* cannot be sustained in an open-ended way. For realism, infinite change is not necessary, as the principle of change itself can change, but the finitude of change cannot be made into a principle (implicitly or not), and this is what closed totalities of the Hegelian mould presuppose. Hegel’s contradictions are destined to reach a final resolution; identity is always restored at the end and completeness eventually always prevails, reason leaves nothing behind. The result becomes not unity-in-diversity (as radical difference can be maintained only temporarily), but self-identity. For Bhaskar, the critical systemic mistake here is that absence itself gets lost, non-identity is always effaced and reason usurps all being. And *practically,* it seems as though at the end of the dialectical journey, we get off the bus, a bit too conveniently, at a Prussian state and a Hegelian philosophy: dialectic is not only systemically bound to end, but it actually has reached that end, culminating in Hegel’s own thought and a nationalist apologism for his state, which is a precursor to Francis Fukuyama’s calling for the end of history. It was especially the critique of this practical ahistoricism that the ‘left Hegelians’, including Marx, embarked upon, a critique to which Bhaskar also subscribes.[175]

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[174]‘The Hegelian totality is constellationally closed, completed. … [Hegel’s achieved identity theory] incorporates the sequence of stages (or conceptual shapes) leading up to it as moments within it and is in fact nothing but this movement of shapes including the finalizing consummating stage, the self-consciousness of spirit as (absolute) spirit in the Hegelian system itself. Speculative philosophy – and its social matrix, rational history – is constellationally finished, at an end. It is at a plateau. There remains a future, of course, but this can be grasped by the understanding –it does not require dialectic or speculative reason. This is the constellational identity of the future within the (Hegelian) present.’ (DPF, p.23).

[175] ‘What is the mystical shell in Hegel? The mystical shell in Hegel is his endism, his triumphalism and his failure to see that the dialectic will carry on; his commitment to what I call ontological monovalence, which

This is the essence of Bhaskar's interpretation of Marx's famous metaphors of the 'rational kernel' and 'mystified shell' of Hegelian dialectic, but what about the metaphor of 'inversion' and putting dialectic back on its feet? Among Bhaskar's aims is at once a 'materialist diffraction' of dialectic, and a dialecticisation of critical realism. Where does this leave the status of dialectics in non-epistemic contexts, such as those parts of the social and human spheres that have not much to do, at least directly, with science and knowledge processes, and nature, understood as being comprised of structures that are independent of human beings? For Engels, who obviously alludes to Marx's inversion metaphor in the quote below, Hegelian dialectic suffers from Hegel's idealist metaphysics. According to Hegel's system, the history of reality, not excluding nature, is a process of the immanent development of an absolute idea –an 'ideological perversion' for Engels– while according to Engels's materialism, if we allow for a bit of anachronism, nature provides the real basis for ideation, which is expressive or reflective of nature, not constitutive of it. The solution to the Hegelian idealist perversion amounts to locating dialectics in nature, its original and ontologically prior place:

> 'We comprehended the concepts in our heads once more materialistically—as images of real things instead of regarding the real things as images of some or other stage of the absolute concept. Thus dialectics reduced itself to the science of the general laws of motion, both of the external world and of human thinking—two sets of laws which are identical in substance, but differ in their expression in so far as the human mind can apply them consciously, while in nature and also up to now for the most part in human history, these laws assert themselves unconsciously, in the form of external necessity, in the midst of an endless series of apparent accidents. Thereby the dialectic of concepts itself became merely the conscious reflection of the dialectical motion of the real world and thus the Hegelian dialectic was placed upon its head; or rather, turned off its head, on which it was standing, and placed upon its feet.' (Engels in 'Ludwig Feuerbach and the End of Classical German Philosophy', *Marx & Engels Collected Works* vol. 26)

is a purely positive account of being. What Hegel does is, when he was completed his system, he absents the very crucial notion of absence itself, he absents absence. It is true to say that he is an apologist for the Prussian state of his time. I think that the Left Hegelians were right.' (SE, p.57).

Under Engels the inversion metaphor entails a reversal of the Hegelian constitutive relation, which can be put schematically as dialectic of cosmic spirit → natural history, such that natural history consists in the development of Geist's self-consciousness. This relation is inverted into the purportedly materialist relation, natural history (including natural dialectic) → thought (and dialectic in thought), such that it is nature and more specifically the dialectics of nature that makes possible dialectical thought.[176] This inversion is secured by the cloak of scientificity by the observation of the 'fundamental laws of dialectics' in nature, which have been systematized in the dialectical materialism of Soviet Marxism as the general principles of the unity of opposites, contradictions leading to change, the transition of quality into quantity etc.[177] Dialectic, *pace* Hegel, was natural all along, nature operates independently of the human mind, and the nature-dialectical thought relation must be inverted. What is common in Hegel and Engels is that their dialectic encompasses both social and natural domains, whereas Bhaskar thinks such a generalization of dialectic cannot be pulled off by philosophical considerations alone and the issue must be dealt with on a case by case basis by the individual sciences in accordance with their specific subject matters. Dialectic's proper realm is the social sphere understood at large, its 'rational kernel' is most clearly captured by the epistemological dialectic of the sciences, and a materialist critique of Hegelian idealism does not entail a generalized naturalization of dialectic. It should also be noted that in Bhaskar's interpretation of Hegelian dialectic, which is much more nuanced than that of Marx and Engels, Hegel's system does not cave as conveniently as Marx and Engels seem to imagine to the 'inversion' they intend to achieve. This is because Hegel's idealism is a form of identity-thinking rather than the thesis that 'thought determines reality', the inversion of which does not alter its

[176] 'Dialectics, so-called objective dialectics, prevails throughout nature, and so-called subjective dialectics, dialectical thought, is only the reflection of the motion through opposites which asserts itself everywhere in nature, and which by the continual conflict of the opposites and their final passage into one another, or into higher forms, determines the life of nature.' (in 'Dialectics of Nature', *Marx & Engels Collected Works* vol.25).

[177] See, for instance, Politzer's *Elementary Principles of Philosophy*, which for many years had attained text-book status in the education of Marxist activists (of a Soviet mold) internationally.

essence of identity: a relation of identity between thought and reality is hardly any different from one between reality and thought.

To summarize, for Bhaskar the rational kernel in Hegelian dialectic is the discovery, isolation and description of the movement to a more inclusive partial totality via the absenting of absences to overcome one-sidedness to reach greater completeness. This movement proceeds from *absence,* is relative, limited to the social domain, open-ended and unabsolute for Bhaskar but not for Hegel, which forms the crux of Bhaskar's objections to him. Hegel's dialectical apparatuses cannot be contained in the closure that Hegel aspires to achieve in the journey of Spirit, and this is where Bhaskar's objections take the form of immanent critique: Hegel's system cannot sustain the revolutionary drive of his own discovery, the 'mystical shell', that is, a closed metaphysics and a lack of an adequate notion of absence, cannot successfully host the 'rational kernel'. In Hegel absence is lost altogether with negativity at the end, while for Bhaskar there is no end to this dialectic, and absence and negativity are always retained in some form and to some measure. The rational kernel is present in, even characteristic and paradigmatic of, epistemic developments and pedagogical processes, and displayed in the actual history of the sciences. It starts with an absence in the conceptual field, which generates inconsistencies and contradictions in theory, which are in turn resolved by remedying the absence typically by reference to a causally prior stratum in reality (deeper structure) or by taking into account more of the causally relevant components in a given stratum (breadth), and thus expanding the existing conceptual field to a larger explanatory scope. A materialist critique of Hegel's dialectic does not license a simple and quick 'inversion' manoeuvre, and dialectic's realm of operation, absent any particular substantial natural scientific evidence, seems to a large extent limited to social processes and the human domain.

We have seen how scientific change, and to put it in a normative and judgementally more qualified way, scientific development, can be understood in terms of dialectic, and touched upon the way

Bhaskar, while describing such epistemic processes, puts to play the notions of absence, incompleteness and negativity into what he (with Marx) considers to be the 'rational kernel' of Hegelian dialectic: a movement towards greater totalities via the invigorating impetus of contradictions. There I discussed how and why absences in theories not only can, but has to generate contradictions, referring to a 'totalitarian' metaphysics (so to speak), and a realist understanding of theory-practice relations. Then we have looked at the contours of Marx's materialist critique of Hegelian dialectic, where I suggested that Marx's intervention consisted more than an inversion, and indeed had to, since an idealism that takes the form of subject-object identity is prone to operations of inversion.

Alongside the counter-Hegelian move of de-logicizing being, Bhaskar situates logic as an important but limited domain of reason, whose contours must be drawn carefully. Analytical reason, that form of reason that is most closely associated with logic, has its place in, but is ultimately only one part of, the dialectic of analytical and dialectical reason, in which dialectical reason 'overreaches' its analytical counterpart. Bhaskar wants to clear two misapprehensions about dialectic, one is the idea that 'dialectics is all about contradictions and all contradictions are logical', and the other is that 'dialectics is the study just of changes and interactions'.

Note that there is a two-tiered distinction here, one between logic and reason, and the other between reason and reality. Logicization of reason, and rationalization of being, and when combined, logicization of being are forms of the epistemic fallacy. Let us consider Parmenides: failing to give a rational account of the disparity between appearances, in which change was evident, Parmenides surmised that change must be not real, and 'made' the world succumb to what he considered to be rational. Reason would not yield to the world; the world had to be rational. But this is a category mistake, as nature is not rational nor irrational: rationality is not a concept that could apply to natural processes, such that it is not possible to say anything about whether the rotation of planet

Earth around its own axis is rational or not. Even evolution, which allows talk about successful and unsuccessful processes of adaptation, escapes such application of this concept. Natural necessity is a *contingent* feature of being as such and is based in the intransitive dimension, and it is categorically different from logical necessity, which is a conditional feature of a specific form of cognitive activity by animals that are capable of reasoning, and is based in the transitive dimension. Forcing the anthropological cognitive category into the whole of nature is a form of analyzing being, or ontology, in terms of a feature of epistemology, which walks into the broad definition of the epistemic fallacy. This is a good place to also note that the epistemic fallacy is a species of the 'anthropic fallacy', the analysis of being in terms of some attributes of human being (ECS 132), and in this case this attribute is of course rationality. And this is *irrational*, since rationality in part lies in understanding the true nature of things, including essences and necessary connections, and adapting oneself to them. Much of rationality consists in comprehending, appreciating, respecting and creatively finding one's way in and around non-rationality.

Let us switch to the other tier of distinction. Formal logic is about rules of proper deduction and validity. Reason is more about truth, soundness, (inexact) judgement, and boundaries. Reason assesses the strengths of the premises, theses and arguments for them based on their approximations to truth, that is, their relation to reality. Logic assesses the strengths of arguments based on relations of inference between premises, but it is reason that comes into play when we assess the truth of the premises by using the epistemic arsenal available to us, question the relevance of the whole argument for the situation at hand, dig into its presuppositions and follow its implications, put it in context, and take or abstain from action accordingly. Here I would like to offer a rough and broad definition of rational thought and activity as 'becoming true to being', being that is understood as *including* oneself (as an individual, group, community, society, species), which is in turn understood as only a limited *part* of being as a whole.

The fuzzier, more-valued (as in many-valued) and more informal the logic, that is, the more logic is allowed to be 'diluted' or 'complicated' by inexactness and grey areas, and the more it is sensitive towards dialectical contexts (i.e. natural settings of actual back-and-forth arguments between people or communities, including lay and everyday conversation) and heuristic functionality (i.e. serving as necessarily limited, action-guiding, tentative approximations under conditions of indeterminacy, lack of certainty or clear evidence) of arguments, the more the two notions, logic and reason, converge. Still, reason will always remain as the more general, encompassing one, staying just over the edge of the ongoing 'confusion', so to speak, of logic with the demands of the complexities of reality, which are potentially infinite. [178]

I will give more weight to this crucial difference between formal logic and rational thought/practice in (a) expounding on the surplus of *Dialectic* over the earlier theory of explanatory critiques and (b) the irreducible dialecticality of assertions as truth claims, which will be important in deriving the whole ethics of *Dialectic* forward, from basic human acts of communication to universal self-realization.

[178] It is also telling that textbooks on 'informal logic' are sometimes presented as guides on 'critical thinking', with the two being almost interchangeable in book titles. But we should be careful not to downplay the epistemic and practical import of formal or standard logic compared with informal and deviant logics.

Chapter 6: Ethics, Politics, Ethico-politics: A Dialectical Embrace

The Ethical Surplus of Dialectical Critical Realism Over and Above the Theory of Explanatory Critiques

It has become customary in brief overviews of critical realism to mark the theory of explanatory critiques (sometimes EC from now on) as the locus of its principal contribution to ethics. This theory was first brought forward in a succinct form in *The Possibility of Naturalism* (Bhaskar's second book),[179] and was later elaborated on in a couple of articles.[180] But its fully articulated and refined form was published in Bhaskar's third original book, *Scientific Realism and Human Emancipation* (SRHE), with great detail and analytical rigour. SRHE is a difficult text, embellished with series of long 'inference schemes' expressed in symbolic logic. It seems Bhaskar intended to refute once and for all, and in an almost mathematically demonstrative fashion, the thesis that one cannot derive values from facts, or an 'ought' from an 'is', while showcasing the strength of depth and stratification, such that explanation, consisting in causal investigations (registering depth) and constituting the goal of social science, enjoys superiority over mere description (which stays on the surface). Only explanatory depth could upgrade criticism to critique. In this section I will discuss some of the tensions implicit in EC, and try to show what novelties *Dialectic* brought in its ethics, over and above the ethics of EC, culminating in a dialectical sublation.

Hume famously framed the mentioned thesis as below:

> In every system of morality, which I have hitherto met with, I have always remark'd, that the author proceeds for some time in the ordinary way of reasoning, and establishes the being of a God, or makes observations concerning human affairs; when of a sudden I am surpriz'd to find, that instead of the usual copulations of propositions, *is*, and *is not*, I meet with no proposition that is not connected with an *ought*, or an *ought not*. This change is imperceptible; but is, however, of the last consequence. For as this *ought*, or *ought not*, expresses some new relation or affirmation, 'tis necessary that it shou'd be observ'd and

[179] See the section titled 'Social Science as Critique: Facts, Values and Theories' in ch.2, and also, p.133.
[180] See chapter 6, titled 'Scientific Explanation and Human Emancipation' in *Reclaiming Reality* (Routledge 2011), and appendix 1, titled 'Social Theory and Moral Philosophy' in *Philosophy and the Idea of Freedom* (Blackwell 1991).

> explain'd; and at the same time that a reason should be given, for what seems altogether inconceivable, how this new relation can be a deduction from others, which are entirely different from it. But as authors do not commonly use this precaution, I shall presume to recommend it to the readers; and am persuaded, that this small attention wou'd subvert all the vulgar systems of morality, and let us see, that the distinction of vice and virtue is not founded merely on the relations of objects, nor is perceiv'd by reason.[181]

It is not *prima facie* clear how committed Hume actually was to the idea that it is ultimately impossible to move from facts to values, but it seems evident both textually (note the phrases 'altogether inconceivable' and 'nor is perceived by reason'), and systematically (note that he eventually contrives an emotivist ethics) that he believed no *rational* inference can be made. Bhaskar is convinced enough that Hume was committed, and shows no reservation about framing the thesis as 'Hume's law'.[182]

Similarly, G.E. Moore argued that judgements about the good (e.g. the good pleasure) are liable to the continuous iteration of the question of whether the natural or metaphysical object (e.g. pleasure) that the good is associated with is really good (e.g. is pleasure really good?), leaving the question open, and rendering the good undefinable, except by trivially vacuous tautology (e.g. the good is good).[183] If evaluative terms evade association with any securely stable content (that is, content that is not susceptible to the infinite slide in the open question), they cannot be referring to natural or metaphysical properties, since factual discourse about such properties *can* convey such content. Thus any attempt at defining the good by reference to natural or metaphysical properties is to

[181] David Hume, *A Treatise of Human Nature*, end of Book III, Part 1 Section 1, ed. Ernest C. Mossner (Penguin, 1985).
[182] See note 95 in SRHE, p.121.
[183] 'If indeed good were a feeling, as some would have us believe, then it would exist in time. But that is why to call it so is to commit the naturalistic fallacy. It will always remain pertinent to ask, whether the feeling itself is good (…).' George Edward Moore, *Principia Ethica*, ed. Thomas Baldwin (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), 93.

commit an illicit reduction, hence he called this the 'naturalistic fallacy'. [184] In fact, *any* definition or analysis of the good, Moore believed, is bound to be fallacious.

Bhaskar does speak of 'the naturalistic fallacy', but by turning the head of the arrow back on itself and calling it fallacious, labelling the general idea the 'anti-naturalistic fallacy', indicating that it is fallacious *because* it is anti-naturalistic. He refers to Moore, together with Hume and Weber, but does not concern himself with the particular analysis of Moore, which is, by Moore's own admission, 'confused'.[185] Bhaskar instead groups 'Hume's law' and the naturalistic fallacy under the broad set of theories that suggest there is an unbridgeable logical gap between facts and values, and presents his theory of explanatory critique as dealing with them both.

Several brief points can be made about the *critical* naturalism Bhaskar subscribes to: (a) it is a *qualified* realism about social objects, and one such qualification lies in acknowledging the immanence of beliefs and values in those objects. In other words, social science is concerned with *ideas about* social structures, positions and relations as well as those structures, positions and relations themselves. To be precise, in the social realm, ideas *are* parts of what they are about, and they are liable to explanation by social science. (b) Ideas are real,[186] that is, they have the potency to bring about change in the world; and reasons can be causes[187], including unconscious ones, and ideas and reasons play an irreducible role in the transformation and reproduction of social structures. (c) Social structures tend to secrete ideologies that might tend to serve to reproduce

[184] 'The naturalistic fallacy always implies that when we think 'This is good,' what we are thinking is that the thing in question bears a definite relation to some one other thing. But this one thing, by reference to which good is defined, may be either what I may call a natural object--something of which the existence is admittedly an object of experience-or else it may be an object which is only inferred to exist in a supersensible real world.' (Ibid. p.90) Moore later explains that by the latter he means metaphysical properties, but he classifies both types of definition (by reference to natural and metaphysical properties) under the naturalistic fallacy.
[185] See his 'Preface to The Second Edition', ibid.
[186] See Roy Bhaskar, "On the Ontological Status of Ideas," *Journal for the Theory of Social Behaviour* 27, no. 2–3 (1997): 139–47.
[187] See ch.3, sec.2-3 of PON.

them, and (d) this sort of secretion can be investigated by social science. If the causal link between a social object and the idea it generates about itself can be revealed, and the generated idea can be shown to be a 'categorially false presentation'[188] of the object, then the social scientific theory takes the form of an explanatory critique by virtue of exposing at once falsity (critique) *and* pinpointing its cause (explanation). (e) The mechanisms by which certain ideas (and not others) become dominant in the ideology of a given social formation is liable to explanation (which can be quasi-functional), and social science can take the form of ideology critique.

The core argument of the theory of explanatory critique can be laid out in the following steps: if a belief about an object has a source, and if there are adequate grounds for supposing the belief to be false and that it is indeed caused by the source, we are logically obliged to negatively evaluate the source and positively evaluate 'action rationally directed at removing it'.[189] Of course, these are subject to the relevant '*ceteris paribus'* clauses. To transpose this into social theoretical terms, if we can show that certain beliefs are false and that they are caused by and/or necessary for the reproduction of some social structure, that is, if we can establish at once a critique and explanation of them, we can move to a negative evaluation of that social structure itself. *Ceteris paribus*, this in turn warrants a positive evaluation of practices towards transforming that structure. The negative evaluation is justified by the illusion-bearing character of the said structure.

Let us now engage in a close reading of some passages that I will suggest to be symptomatic of an absence in EC, which is to be sublated in dialectical critical realism. In *A Meeting of Minds: Socialists Discuss Philosophy,* a small, collectively written, relatively forgotten but precious jewel of a book published in 1991, Roy Bhaskar and fellow CR-inclined socialists such as Chris Arthur,

[188] SRHE, p.132.
[189] SRHE, p.120.

Ted Benton, Hilary Wainwright et al. are at their most politically programmatic in critical realist literature. There the core argument of EC is given further concrete substance:

> 'Thus, if we accept Marx's critique of political economy, which is also a critique of the illusory or false consciousness which capitalist society generates, we may — indeed must — pass immediately to a negative evaluation of those structures and to a positive evaluation of action rationally directed to changing them.'[190]

But the sentence that immediately follows this concise formulation, originally parenthesized, expresses a *tension* in EC:

> (This is of course not to imply that the misleading way capitalism manifests itself is the sole or main reason for being a socialist. This will turn rather on capitalism's failure to meet human needs and aspirations.)

This is significant for multiple reasons. Bhaskar, being first and foremost a philosopher of and for human emancipation (which was the case even when he was working particularly on the philosophy of natural science, during the *RTS* period), had introduced the theory of explanatory critiques as an underlabouring metatheory of social sciences to disclose their impetus for political struggles for transforming oppressive social structures. The theory-political praxis relation works two ways: such struggles *need* explanatory theories in order to get to the root causes of social problems, and explanatory theories evince the necessity for transformation, demonstrating the intrinsic inconsistency of practices in favour of preserving oppressive structures. But EC, if it is presented as a steadfast refutation of Hume's law and the (anti-)naturalistic fallacy, and is assigned the job of logically bridging the fact-value divide, clearly has to serve this emancipatory political purpose with an unrelenting grip on truth and nothing but the truth, as no alien value judgements are allowed to sneak in under the guise of factual ones. And if *falsity* lies only in the relations between a social object and its manifestation, appearance, and the generation and maintenance of false ideas, and if EC, understood in the strong sense, and held to such demanding requisites, can make use only of (to generalize some terms of the above passage) 'the misleading ways a social structure manifests itself', and not 'a social structure's failure to meet human needs and aspirations', then its critical

[190] p.11.

bite, despite its apodictic strength, can fall short of encompassing the totality of sufficient grounds for engaging in transformative political praxis (a generalization of 'reasons for being a socialist' in the above passage). This would mean some of those grounds would remain vulnerable to the Humean/anti-naturalistic attack.

Bhaskar was of course aware of the problem. *Scientific Realism and Human Emancipation* was first published (1986) five years before *A Meeting of Minds,* but he had anticipated and dealt with the tension: 'But the human sciences are not only concerned to explain "*cognitive* ills": their *explananda* are not exhausted by beliefs.' The non-cognitive ills, he goes on, can be practical (which include 'ill-health, misery, repression, including 'the socio-economic ills of oppression, brutality, war, exploitation, poverty, waste etc.'), psycho-social ('pathological violence, neurotic compulsion, boredom, hysteria, etc.', and communicative ('which include deception (…), distortion etc.').[191] And he argues that his earlier 'inference scheme' (I.S.), denoting the core argument of the theory of explanatory critique that I summarized above, 'can be straightaway generalised to deal with the explanation of non-cognitive ills, with a corresponding deduction of evaluative and practical judgements, as in I.S.3 (…)', which is: 'T exp. I-H. -V (I-H) → -V(S → I-H) → V-s'. Interpreted into non-symbolic language, if we have a theory (T) that can adequately explain ill-health (I-H) by showing some social situation or condition or system of relations to be the sources (S) of it, a negative evaluation (-V) of ill health leads to a negative evaluation of those sources of ill-health, which in turn leads to a positive evaluation (V) of action rationally oriented towards the removal that source (-s). Moving on, Bhaskar writes:

> 'However, it will be immediately obvious that these deductions, despite their evident epistemic and practical weight, are no longer from purely factual premises or from what is immediately or self-evidently constitutive of purely factual discourse; and so they do not formally refute Hume's law. (…) But further reflection shows another possibility here: namely that there are *non-cognitive* conditions, such as a degree of good health and the absence of marked asymmetries in political, economic and the other modalities of power, for

[191] SRHE, p.129.

> discourse (including factual discourse) in general to be possible. If this is correct, then a formal derivation of an 'ought' can proceed as in
>
> *I.S.4* T > P. T exp.I-H. T exp. (I-H → I(P)) → -V(S → I-H) → V-s'. [192]

Let us translate this again: a theory explains a belief (P) to be false, and additionally explains ill-health, pinpointing its sources in the way described earlier. Now, if the theory can also show that ill-health *causes* the false belief, this leads to a negative evaluation of the sources of ill health, and a positive evaluation of the removal of those sources. This does acknowledge, and try to address the problem situated in the previously quoted symptomatic passage from *A Meeting of Minds,* as Bhaskar intends his theory to cover for the *non-cognitive* malaise (generalized as ills) caused by what in *A Meeting of Minds* is manifestly pinpointed as the capitalist mode of production. But it does this only to the extent that the metatheoretical framework allows, which is limited by an analytical understanding of truth: ill-health is evaluated negatively only because it ultimately undermines the possibility of factual *discourse,* and generates false *beliefs.* The hook attached to the truth-side of the fact-value connection stays inside the epistemological domain, and non-cognitive ills can be attacked only in virtue of, and via the mediation of cognitive ills. It is vital to mark here that at the time of the pre-dialectical formulations of the theory of explanatory critiques in SRHE, Bhaskar was still operating within this sort of epistemological-cognitive-discursive conception of truth, while at the same time seeking to tap into its non-cognitive grounds. We can observe indeed, as Mervyn Hartwig beautifully describes in *The Formation of Critical Realism*, that SRHE was a strive towards *Dialectic*: it stretches the boundaries of analytical thought with great effort, but nevertheless remains inside it.[193] I suggest that this tension is, in the terminology of *Dialectic,* a symptom of an *absence,* the absence of the concept of alethic truth, to be sublated in *Dialectic*

[192] Ibid., pp.129-130.

[193] 'For me, [SRHE] is in some respects to *Dialectic* what *Grundrisse* is to *Capital*. I see it as a kind of prolegomenon to *Dialectic,* or better a *prodrome* in the literal sense, a running towards it, a working through of some of the main issues in that direction, but also a consolidation, a marshalling of energies and resources that 'concentrates its fire' on analytical rather than dialectical philosophy while you seek the key to transposing and elaborating your project in a dialectical register.' (FCR, p.97).

through a deeper, ontological conception of truth, which is not necessarily cognitive nor necessarily discursive, and, in the context of ethico-politics, is concretized in a philosophical anthropology.[194]

I will now make some sweeping characterizations of *Dialectic.* Some of the moves it makes can be reconstructed, I suggest, in the following way:

(a) Grounding politics in ethics – thus we have an *axiology* of freedom

(b) Grounding ethics in truth – the truth of human being equals the good for human being

(c) Grounding truth in reality – truth is conceived as ontological (the notion of alethia)

(d) Defining the alethia of human beings is freedom, which comes full circle back to a politics.

The core ethico-political thesis of *Dialectic* is the idea that freedom, understood as universal human flourishing, is the *truth* of human being.[195] This is without doubt a stipulation on human nature and human existence, in other words, it rests on a *philosophical anthropology*.[196] It asks, what are the things that are presupposed by and implicit in even the most basic of human acts, and what are their implications? Its method for reaching general conclusions is a non-analytically conceived, non-formally (that is, non-categorically) derived universalization. What is non-formal about it? It is a universalization not instantiated by judging singular acts against an absolute generalization of the principle of the act ('telling a lie is never right because if it were to be established as a general principle to tell lies the possibility of discourse, together with telling lies itself, would disappear altogether', would be the Kantian line of thinking in a simplified form), which operates only one-

[194] For an interpretation that compellingly recasts some important themes of dialectical critical realism as a naturalistic philosophical anthropology, see Craig Reeves' excellent article "Freedom, Dialectic and Philosophical Anthropology," *Journal of Critical Realism* 12, no. 1 (2013): 13–44.

[195] 'On the position I am mooting, then, moral truth or alethia is universal concretely singularized freedom.' (*Plato Etc.*, p.109).

[196] '(…) Substantively, the formal criterion of what I will call the supreme good has to be fleshed out by an empirically grounded theory of the possibilities of developing four-planar social being in nature.' Ibid., p.109 'Four-planar social being in nature' is Bhaskar's historicized, socialized and ecologized version of the concept of human nature.

dimensionally –horizontally– and strips the singularity of particular acts (the act of telling a lie –> generalizing it as a principle). Dialectical universalization is instantiated on the contrary by bringing an act of agency down to its *grounds*, revealing the commonality of those grounds with different (types of) acts, and committing the agent to maintain a consistency between the common ground and the different acts. This is very much in line with the ancient Greek conception of dialectic as a method of reasoned investigation into the truth of a matter: resolving the tension between adversarial positions by stepping back (or going deeper) into a common ground, and then moving forward from there by judging their relative consistency with the common ground.[197] This recognizes, on the way back up from the meta-level of the ground to the level of acts, the particularity that acts attain via differential mediations, allowing the possibility of contradiction, and registering the necessity of prioritization, justified by the hierarchy in the depth ontology of the grounds against which the acts are judged. This type of universalization, the dialectical type, hence operates two-dimensionally: horizontally singularizing –not generalizing–, vertically depth-totalizing.

For dialectical critical realism, a drive for universal human flourishing is implicit in all human discourse *and* agency[198], importantly including non-discursive agency, and since intentional agency is imperative (that is, we cannot not act for reasons)[199], this drive, although it can be counteracted by other causal forces, is inexorable. As long as human beings judge, desire, speak, act, and have the capacity to ground their beliefs and actions (the requisite for dialectical universalization), that is,

[197] In the ancient Greek art of dialectical disputation, this is usually put to use in refuting an interlocutor's position. If a respondent defends a belief B, and the questioner holds the opposite belief –B, the questioner can adopt the strategy of finding a common belief Bc that they both hold true, and demonstrate that Bc is consistent with -B, while inconsistent with B, thus showcasing the superiority of her totality as it can sustain both Bc and –B while exposing a weakness in the totality of the respondent: Either Bc or B must give way.

[198] 'The good society is implicit in elemental desire.' (ibid., p.123).

be what human beings are and do what human beings do, this drive will be a causal force in the world. It is a transfactually real tendency of human existence.[200]

The bearing this has on Hume's law, and the *surplus* it has over earlier formulations of the theory of explanatory critique is that, if it can be successfully pulled off, we can now speak not only of the truth and untruth of some set of beliefs about human being, but truths and untruths of human being. Thus:

if (1) social ills can be explained as constraints on universal *human flourishing*, and

if (2) universal human flourishing can be shown to be the alethic truth of human being through

(3) a philosophical anthropological analysis of certain necessary features of human existence and human nature

(3a) viz. the analysis of the presuppositions and implications of basic acts of agency,

(3b) which are shown to be necessary, then

(4) social ills can be described as *untruths* '*to*, *of*, *in* and *for*'[201] human being.

This type of inference scheme delivers a more robust and immediate formal refutation of Hume's law compared to the one in SRHE because the transition from fact to value does not merely hinge on how social ills cause false beliefs but how they constitute a *falsity* in themselves, and the problem stated in the symptomatic *caveat* in the passage from *A Meeting of Minds* I analysed above is resolved.

This is an apposite occasion to make some metaphilosophical points. The philosopher's job is always to bite the bullet and ask the questions of the type, just *what* is good about the right to proper

[200] The way Bhaskar derives these conclusions from an analysis of the judgement form and basic agency are best explained in Alan Norrie's *Dialectic and Difference* ch. 5, esp. section 'Dialectical rationality: from "primal scream" to eudaimonia' pp.132-144.

[201] 'In the eudaimonistic society every concretely singular individual would be true to, of, in and for herself and every other.' (DPF, p.277).

housing, or *what* is wrong with patriarchy?, and the only answers that will settle the question for her are of the type 'because they are true', or 'because they are untrue'. Such a benevolent (Socratic) gadfly can carry the caveat stated in *A Meeting of Minds* a step down, and pose the question 'so what is bad about a social system's "failure to meet human needs and aspirations", then?' Is this more than mere agitation or nihilistic rumination? Very much so, because this is precisely the impetus that moves us to discover the dialectically universal grounds of things, where we can learn more about the level we are in practice working at (in virtue of the commonality of the ground among different things and practices), and from this learning process new and better modes of emancipatory agency might spring. The metatheoretical framework of *Dialectic* underlabours for this kind of process, e.g. making it possible for one to respond, 'because it is untrue to and of (human) being'. 'What else, then', we might ask, 'is untrue to and of human being?', 'what else is grounded by this?', 'what other singulars are concretizations of this universal?' etc, so that we, being human, can engage in 'action rationally oriented towards removing them' (as stated in the last step of the core argument of the EC). And the dialectic continues. To return to the context of our example (the passage from *A Meeting of Minds*), this is how, for instance, one can extend their politics of class struggle to encompass emancipatory struggles around sex, gender, race, etc. (with their multitudinous intersections, of course), and bring them together under the DCR notion of 'generalized master-slave relations', and from there, to that of those around different species (which also have *needs*) and ecological concerns.

Under the rubric of *Dialectic,* ills are considered as '*falsehoods* to concretely singularized human nature', and alienation is understood as 'being something other than, separated, split, torn, or estranged from oneself, or what is essential and intrinsic to one's nature', and conversely, freedom is considered as the 'alethia of human being', and autonomy is understood as 'being true to, for and in oneself'. Compared to SRHE, or the pre-dialectical theory of explanatory critiques, the evaluative and transformative projects of remedying ills (including non-cognitive ones), de-alienation, self-

determination (as autonomy), and emancipation thus conceived have a more immediate and direct connection with truth and the natures of being (most relevantly in this context, the nature of human being). We see a shift, between SRHE and *Dialectic*, from formality to substance, logic to reason, truth as epistemological to truth as ontological, from scientific practices to everyday practical life (basic acts of intentional agency), from sociology (e.g. the theoretical model of social activity) to anthropology (e.g. four-planar social being in nature), from ethical naturalism to moral realism, *in toto* culminating in a partial and qualified extension of the logic of dialectic from the epistemological realm to the ontological realm. This constitutes a *sublation* in the DCR sense of the term, because it absents the absence (in EC) of the concept of alethic truth, and can accommodate (a) fact-value transitions of the sort that cannot be accommodated as easily in the framework of EC and (b) non-scientific activity as well as scientific activity. This is an instance of dialectic at work, which is 'remedy of incompleteness or absence by building a greater, more inclusive, more comprehensive totality of theoretical or social wholes'.[202] We could characterize this development as a Platonic manoeuvre due to the more immediate and robust connection between truth and good, but also a development substantiated in an Aristotelian manner due to its basis in anthropology. It is not an arbitrary preference of jargon, then, that *Dialectic* is, to a much greater extent than previous works, adorned with ancient Greek concepts such as *eudaimonia, phronesis, sophrosyne, aletheia* etc.

Can we also speculate on an 'ethical surplus' of the philosophy of meta-reality, which Bhaskar developed over the course of his later years, over and above *Dialectic*? I believe we can, but for now can only offer a rough sketch of how. I suggest the philosophy of meta-reality (sometimes PMR) can be interpreted as a radical deepening of the notion of alethic truth, and a radical expansion of the third level of the MELD schema, viz. totality. Consider the possibility that just like we can within the contours of *Dialectic* talk about the truth of human beings and derive from it the

[202] ONN, p.66.

goods for human beings, we can talk about the truth of being (with a capital B, so to speak), conceived as the totality of totalities, which includes but obviously transcends the (sub-)totality of *human* being, and derive from it goods for being, augmenting in turn our understanding of the good for human being which is a part of it. We could describe this as carrying the Platonic torch further, and digging the substantiation deeper from the Aristotelian realm of anthropology -including the social realm-, to ontology *as such*. This would achieve another sublation, described just earlier as expanding the theoretical totality within which we investigate these matters. There are strong reasons to think that the intellectual ambitions of the philosophy of meta-reality lie in just this kind of dialectic, but a sufficient elaboration of them will exceed the current scope of this thesis. However, even this rudimentary speculation can supply the methodological clue that in *Dialectic* it is the notions of alethic truth and 3L totality that do most of the sublative work. Let us get back to *Dialectic,* then, and analyze further the notion of totality, contextualizing it in ethics and politics.

Senses of Total: Structure, Agency and Totality

In *Dialectic,* explicit discussions of morality are scarce, and are usually in the form of sketches, gestures, position-markers (positions such as moral realism and ethical naturalism), references to moral concepts from ancient Greek philosophy (such as *phronesis* –practical wisdom– and *sophrosyne* –temperance, or self-control–) and some extremely concise formulations for ethical criteria (for instance, the criteria of dialectical universalizability) made *en passant*. However, major ethical implications can be found in the rich backdrop of analyses of the concepts of truth, theories of communication, and politics.

When he is presenting the MELD schema, Bhaskar appoints ‘ethical dialectics’ to the third level (L), i.e. totality. This is a peculiar emplacement, since if morality could be understood as dealing with right or wrong human action, at first glance the fourth dimension, i.e. transformative agency, could be considered as the natural home for it. This would be where any theory regarding the good,

or more specifically the human good, or actually existing morality predominant in societies (including tendencies steeped in sexism, ego-centrism, consumerism etc.), would have their practical consequences and make a difference in the world, possibly (and ordinarily) including the preservation of the status quo. The main reason ethical *dialectics* falls under the category of totality is that it depends on a universalizability of a non-Kantian, that is, non-analytical kind. In the third level of MELD, things are considered under the aspect of their relations and their roles in structures which they together constitute, and these structures in turn exist in virtue of the relations of their constituents. When part of a totality, a thing cannot be regarded as a stand-alone, isolated entity; it is internally related to other things and the whole that they make up together, which means that it would not be what it is if it were not so related. For critical realism, society is one such totality, and the relations that hold between individuals are of a totality-forming, constitutive kind.[203] So what is right for a human being cannot be seen as isolated from what is right for the totality that encompasses her, that is, absolutely individual moral principles cannot be consistent, since the individual is internally related to others and society at large, and on an even more inclusive level, to nature, which has to be taken account when formulating the principles. This is why morality has to have a *holistic* component to it: it has to be *universalizable*.

Note here that the dialectical notions of holism and totality defined as such are developments of the notion of structure[204], and this is an important feature of the analysis of methodological individualism carried out in critical naturalism, allowing it to offer conceptual tools to underlabour for social theory and ideology critique. Even in basic critical realism, every thing is conceived as a structure, with no assumption of an 'indivisible' unit at the lower end, breaking away from atomism

[203] Society is not the only totality of which human beings are parts. For instance, nature, the universe, or being in general can be seen as greater totalities, formed by sub-totalities of various kinds.

[204] This is one of the many ways in which basic critical realism was to some extent already dialectical. One could argue, any powerful metatheory, especially for human sciences and social science, would need to be infused with dialectical thought in both its totalizing and particularizing aspects, even if it is not explicit or witting about it.

and the quest for foundationalism; and no arbitrary presupposition of an ultimate, closed, all-encompassing structure at the higher end. For various forms and degrees of methodological individualism, the idea of structure can be undermined in two ways, which tend to be intermingled in the dominant ideologies of contemporary capitalist and patriarchal societies. (1) Any given social entity, such as the family or the nation-state can be understood as 'indivisible', thus denying diversity and real opposition. For example, any member of a family might and generally does have different needs from any other member, or, the interests of an economic class of a nation-state can and typically do clash with the interests of another, but if families or nation-states are not conceived as 'structures' within themselves, that is, that they are not understood to be complex and dynamic compositions of different entities and their relations, it is not possible to conceptualize these personal and social phenomena. The methodological individualist tendencies of *ideologies* of liberalism and conservatism are of course not a coincidence. The epistemologically individualised entities (such as the family and the nation-state, in our examples) are ontologically structured with charged relations of *polarities* of power. Hence in patriarchal societies, promoting the idea of the family as an indivisible unit would fortify the dominance of the 'father', who enjoys the representative privilege of the whole 'unit' such that the 'interests of the family' are biased towards the interest of men, whose needs and interests do not necessarily align with other members of the family, especially the mother. And similarly, in the 'same boat' ideology of capitalist societies, the interests of the nation-state as a whole tend to coincide with the interests of the capitalist class, which is by definition opposed to the interests of the working class.

In the second way methodological individualism undermines the notion of structure, human beings or the family or nation-states etc. would be such types of entity that, independently of whether it is a composite structure in itself (although political conservatism generally tends to overlook diversity in any given structure), would hardly be a part or component of a higher or greater structure, an outlook that severs them (individuals, families, nation-states etc.) from their constitutive relations

with each other (e.g. friendships, communities, societies, global population), and illicitly taking them to comprise stand-alone entities.[205]

We can draw an important conclusion from here: an appreciation of the idea of totality goes *both* towards (a) totalization, that is, looking at things under the aspect of their relations with other things, some of which are internally constitutive (that is, partly determines the kind of thing they are) and (b) particularization, that is, looking at individual things under the aspect of the different parts and the relations between these parts that comprise the thing (some of which are outer relations)[206]. These notions, even though their signifiers indicate the more encompassing end (i.e. not the part but the structure, not the single entity but the totality) do not undermine individual liberty at the expense of collective good but reinforce it. Conceptualizing society as a structure, and as its parallel, conceptualizing individuals as members of a structure is necessary for appreciating the diversity of individuals while acknowledging common needs and interests. In this sense, it is methodological individualism that is the more totalitarian theory.

Another important point to keep in mind is that the idea that we should view society, nature and the universe dialectically, i.e. as totalities, is not an epistemological postulate. Aristotle's idea of the z*oon politikon* is not an a priori principle, it is a factual *a posteriori* thesis that has an empirically supported bearing on ontology, lying at the intersection of anthropology and sociology. No good social theory is possible without metatheoretical and methodological clarifications around, and arguably the utilizations of these conceptual tools, but without any non-formally derived factual

[205] In the ideological sphere, examples of the way this 'materializes' would be, on the scale of the person and the family, political inclinations to get individually armed and stockpile goods to 'prepare' oneself and their family in apprehension of the imminent threat of global environmental collapse and the Hobbsean 'state of nature' that would ensue; and on the scale of nation-states, a refusal to participate in international collaborations to reduce global warming.

[206] It is essential to remember that dialectical thinking does allow for outer relations; otherwise the notion of a totality would collapse into unitism or blockism.

content (for instance, of the sort establishing human beings as *social* animals), ethics, like philosophy in general, cannot proceed 'any more than boots can climb mountains'. [207]

So this is one way the earlier conceptualizations of structure and agency in basic critical realism, under the 'transformational model of social activity', is transposed into the terminology of *Dialectic*, via the third 'level' in the MELD schema which pertains to totality. This can be connected to ethics through multiple threads. One thread starts by furnishing us with the tools to break away from some misconceptions regarding structure and agency. Appreciating the dialectical relation between the individual and the social helps dissolve the dichotomy drawn between these two terms. One important point to keep in mind when trying to understand how the MELD schema can be associated with the TMSA is that 'totalities are structures', and that this link provides 'a special affinity between 3L and 1M',[208] the former being the natural home of totality, and the latter of structure. 'Structure' and 'agency' cannot be placed at the two opposing ends of a spectrum spanning an increasing degree of 'freedom', where on the structure end there is little room for individuals to enjoy personal liberty (inhibiting agency) and on the agency end the social relations are loose and structure is light. The level of freedom in societies cannot be evaluated by the degree to which they are 'structure-dominant' or 'agency-dominant'.

If human beings are indeed *political* animals, such that they are always going to have to forge relations with each other in order to produce goods, meet their needs, and survive, the social character of human existence is a given, establishing not only the actual thrownness of the individual into an already-existing society but also the necessity of societal relations for the possibility of agency in the first place. The idea underpinning TMSA that structure and agency are *internally* related, in the way that any agency is going to either reproduce or transform social

[207] SRHE, p.12.
[208] *Plato Etc.*, p.126.

structures, and any social structure can exist only through the activities of agents, entails the idea that *agents* are internally related, forming a system of internal relations, which just is the definition of totality offered by Roy Bhaskar.[209]

There is thus a crucial difference between (a) an exclusively analytical outlook on the given relatedness of human beings, within which an existentially constitutive individualism is maintained such that human beings are animals who contingently (as opposed to necessarily, i.e. in virtue of the very kind of thing they are) happen to be political, and individuals are the kinds of things they are whose socialization comes as an extra, any effect of which on the individual is analogous to the effects a pile of billiard balls might have on a single ball upon their interaction; and (b) a dialectical outlook according to which human beings are political animals who become the individual they are by relations of entity formation and internal constitution, i.e., their relatedness, and the actual relations being an essential feature and part of the kind of thing they are. In the words Hegel used to define his concept of *Geist*, the 'we' is *in* the 'I'. In the first outlook, freedom of an individual is possible independently of the level of freedom enjoyed by society as a whole, while in the second, the two are necessarily and intrinsically connected. It must also be added that in only the dialectical outlook it is possible to explain how the structure of social formations can have an effect on the actually existing interpersonal relations of individuals: the causality at work at the level of the individual is not limited to the sum total of the ordinary interactions they have with others (buying a newspaper, hugging a loved one, getting paid by the employer), typically one can interact with only a small number of the members of a society throughout a lifetime.

A cautionary note here is necessary though to once again sustain hiatuses and differentiality: one essential difference between DCR's and Hegel's dialectics is that the whole is not wholly contained

[209] 'Totalities are systems of internal relations, which may assume various forms of intra-activity and operate via holistic causality.' (Glossary, DPF)

within each of its parts, nor is totality totally expressed by them.[210] Indeed, expressivist understandings of totality instil a dangerous pessimism by ascribing omnipotence to the system, as agency gets usurped by structure, and every act of agency can be dismissively analysed away into (to make a slightly distorting allusion to Hegel's famous idea of 'the cunning of reason'[211]) the 'cunning' of social structure (e.g. the contemporarily globally predominant consumer capitalism), whereas the potential for resistance and transformation can exist in the very gaps, cracks, distances and absences within totalities, as well as their grounds (when a totality is viewed as a sub-totality of larger ones).

This renders the questions of choosing between structure and agency, and whether or not to have a structure, or to what degree of structuration to have, obsolete: the question is *how* society must be structured (i.e. what kind of structure must be in place) to foster the free flourishing (including individual autonomy) of the agents who make up that society. An important note here is that the 'structure and agency' pair does not correspond to the pair of the state and the individual, hence there is nothing analytical to the concept of structuration that leads to an understanding of its materialization as state-intervention in the private lives of individuals. Thus liberalism is not the relative absence of social structure, nor is socialism the over-abundance of it.[212]

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[210] 'I think the idea of a structured and differentiated totality that is also developing is a permanent legacy. This is very important as against the use of totality in Hegel and in some strands of western Marxism. It is not a reductive or expressive totality, and that is why the point about the different elements not being equally important in an explanatory sense is so crucial. You could say that everything that happens in our world bears the imprint of the fundamental relations of the capitalist mode of production. That is true, but they do so in differential ways.' (FCR, p.99)

[211] G. W. F. Hegel, *Introduction to the Philosophy of History*, trans. Leo Rauch (Indianapolis and Cambridge: Hackett Publishing Company, 1988), 35.

[212] This is echoed by the remarks of Andrew Collier on planning. The lack of economic planning does not imply a lack of social structure, on the contrary, it is a feature of a certain social structure itself, which has causal (and environmentally catastrophic) consequences: 'Perhaps it will clarify matters if we distinguish two ways in which human power over the earth could be increased. By substituting common control for blind, market-driven blundering in our production of effects on the environment. And by developing technology so that our power (individual and collective) to produce effects is increased. If the latter occurs without the former, we only become more dangerous bootboys. The former on the contrary increases our power over our power; our power to control the effects that we produce. Only this enables us to limit the effects of our powers. Under planless conditions, the increase of our powers to produce unplanned effects

This has strong implications for the topology of ethics and politics. Aristotle's *Nicomachean Ethics* seems to begin just the way a work on politics would normally begin,[213] and ends with a discussion of the necessity of proper 'legislation' and 'statesmanship' for upbringing morally fine citizens, indicating that the current discussion (of ethics) would be insufficient without a discussion of political matters, and smoothly segues into the study of politics, as if his moral and political works were two contiguous parts of a single volume.[214] Be that as it may, ethics in the contemporary western philosophical education is taught as a discipline that is mainly concerned with the actions of human beings *qua* individuals, and politics as the study of the collective activities of, and relations among human beings *qua* social agents, and the structures that these relations form.

Now it is essential to maintain the specificity of the objects of ethics and politics, but this must be accompanied by an acknowledgement of the possibility of perspectival switches, transitions, and a relation of grounding between the two. There are grave ethical and political consequences when persons conceived as agents of ethics and persons conceived as social agents of politics are taken to be not only abstractly differentiated, but ontologically separated entities. This creates, on the one hand, a de-moralized politics, which cannot rationally justify the ends of transformative social activity (what is good about collective emancipatory praxis that one should engage in them, and, to bite an even harder bullet, what is *bad* about generalized power2 relations?), undermining

through technology inevitably proceeds. Indeed this productivist 'dynamism of the market' is the chief argument used against planning. But the market also determines how we use these powers, and it does so in a way that is indifferent to human and environmental damage done.' Andrew Collier, *Being and Worth* (London and New York: Routledge, 2005), 87.

[213] 'If so, we must try, in outline at least, to determine what it is, and of which of the sciences or capacities it is the object. It would seem to belong to the most authoritative art and that which is most truly the master art. And politics appears to be of this nature (…). These, then, are the ends at which our inquiry, being concerned with politics, aims'. (Aristotle, *Complete Works*, 1094a25-1094b14).

[214] 'Now our predecessors have left the subject of legislation to us unexamined; it is perhaps best, therefore, that we should ourselves study it, and in general study the question of the constitution, *in order to complete* to the best of our ability the philosophy of human nature.' (Ibid., 1181b, emphasis added)

judgemental rationality, and on the other, undermining ontological depth-realism, an a-politicized morality, which cannot achieve the envisioned ends for the individual due to the *social* character of the obstacles that need to be absented along the way, or as the end in itself properly understood, which requires social science/explanatory critique. Indeed, just as any epistemological theory that explicitly suppresses ontology nonetheless *secretes* a tacit ontology, only an impoverished one, any politics that explicitly suppresses ethics secretes an ethics willy-nilly, as the 'always already moralized character' of social relations (which political activity either transforms or reproduces) is an essential part of the subject-formation processes of ideologies.

This goes the other way around, too: all moral positions have political presuppositions and implications. But even more critical is that any reasonably substantive and comprehensive moral project, if it is to inform, motivate and actualize any teleological/intentional content of human activity, is going to have to comply with the reality principle by engaging in a relevant and efficient fashion with nature and society, ontological levels into which human existence is embedded through and through. An analysis of the reasons even the most vulgarly formulated ideologies of individualism fail on the ethical level cannot be contented with lay descriptions of the selfishness, egoism, malevolence etc. that taint them, even though such descriptions might just be accurate; but lest one encounter the likes of an Ayn Rand, or the brazen Thrasymachus of Plato's *Republic* who might be willing to wear such descriptions as epaulettes, such an analysis should proceed swiftly on to the ways in which these ideologies rely on (either an explicit or implicit) denial of the actually prevailing states of affairs, or way things really are in the world, in this case, the core sociality of human existence, and its corollary, the untenability of an a-socially conceived human being. But how are such one-on-one dialectical battles fought in the field, 'outside the wire', so to speak, and even won? By way of immanent critique, reinforced by the axiological imperative: one must demonstrate a contradiction in the opponent's position, which can be between theory-theory ('it is raining' and 'it is not raining'), theory-practice (I assert that gravity is an illusion but I take the

ground floor every time I exit the building), and practice-practice (I report someone for violating the rules of traffic but I violate them regularly myself).

Since human beings are *inter alia* social beings, and human existence is *inter alia* social existence, ethics and politics must form a dialectical dual. Politics cannot be conceived as an unwelcome necessity standing in the way of the prospects of individual happiness that ethics would otherwise smoothly engender. Nor is engaging in collective action for well-being on a societal scale should be conceived as a heroic sacrifice on the individual's part.[215] Ethics and politics acquire their fullest sense only in a dialectical ethico-politics: In the way *eudaimonia* is defined in *Dialectic*, individual autonomy is possible only through *universal* human flourishing, and the *real* interests of individuals lie in struggling for totalizing praxis, that is, in this context, collective activity oriented towards social transformation.[216]

What does the MELD schema bring afresh to this? This dialectic, conceptualized in earlier formulations in CR as the TMSA, or the dialectic between structure and agency, is in the terminology of *Dialectic* both deepened and widened in the third level, i.e. totality. Society is just one sub-totality inside an open-ended totality of totalities, understood as *being*, incorporating both existence and absence. And while the human agent is not only situated, but also constituted in a web of internal and external relations, society in its turn is similarly a part of the larger structures of life, nature, and being in general. The individual's constitution is not atomistic, but it is also not exhausted by the level of social mechanisms.

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[215] Cf. 'Totalizing praxis requires a vast stretching of the moral imagination. In considering this it should be borne in mind that only the empowered individual can assist or effectively solidarize with the powerless, so that amour de soi, rather than amour propre, is the true fount of all 'altruism', and that it is enlightening not egoistic for the individual to acknowledge her real self-interests.' DPF, 247; and 'It would seem that through what I will call the (12) dialectic of material interests agents will discover that altruism is in their purely egoistic interests.' (DPF, p.271).

[216] 'Thus as criteria for rational agency one must possess the knowledge to act on one's own real interests (the cognitive requirement); be able to access the skill, resources and opportunities to do so (the empowered component); and be disposed to so act (the dispositional or motivational condition).' (DPF, p.243).

The third level of MELD, totality, due to its width (denoting the variety of mechanisms, structures and fields coming into play without necessarily implying ontological priority) and depth (denoting grounding and setting the conditions of possibility), allows the fourth dimension (4D) in the schema, i.e. transformative praxis and the dialectic of freedom, to run not only between agents and social structures but also to tap into the multifarious aspects of human existence not limited by social construction and levels of nature and even more generally the cosmos, ushering new powers and sources in the processes through which social structures are transformed and agents achieve autonomy. While the critique of methodological individualism refutes the idea that individuals are Robinson Crusoes and societies collections of islands, society at large is not one large Pangaea itself either, which allows depth-strugglers for social change to bring new fuel into the social transformation process from the deeper and wider structures of which societies are parts. This is one way out of cultural relativism. The ability to refer to totalities under, above or outside the cultural realm, is only possible once the third level of MELD, i.e. totality, is understood to *encompass*, rather than be exhausted by, social construction.

The Transformational Model of Social Activity and 3L Totality

In Bhaskar's oeuvre, the transformational model of social activity, the discussion of the people-society connection, and the relationship between structure and agency are first undertaken in *The Possibility of Naturalism* (abbreviated as PON throughout this text), which is his second book, and importantly, a book written before the 'dialectical turn' initiated in *Dialectic* and later developed in *Plato Etc.* A close textual inspection of the relevant sections in PON can shed light on what new ground is intended to be covered by the dialectical MELD schema. In an especially stark statement in PON, Bhaskar expressly dismisses the idea of a dialectical relation between people and society: 'People and society are not, I shall argue, related "dialectically". They do not constitute two

moments of the same process. Rather they refer to radically different kinds of thing'[217]. This is not a one-off, accidental remark, and is reproduced without modifications in the fifth chapter of *Reclaiming Reality* (a collection of previously published articles and book chapters), taken *in toto* from PON. A branch of this idea is reiterated in Par Enghölm's entry on the TMSA in *The Dictionary of Critical Realism*, who writes, 'Here people and society are not seen as two moments of the same process, but as two ontologically distinct entities, related in terms of emergence,' although the refrain from describing the relationship as 'not dialectical' is perhaps deliberate, and might allude to the fact that this relationship is construed differently after the dialectical turn. In the relevant section in PON (before the turn), Bhaskar goes on to present a 'Model III' of the people-society relation, based on the works of Peter Berger, as a confused mid-way, or a failed attempt to dialectically sublate models I and II which are marred by the voluntarism of Weberian and the reification of Durkheimian sociology respectively. He finds this third model 'misleading', and names it 'the "dialectical" conception, illicit identification',[218] and observes between people and society an 'ontological hiatus'[219] in the intransitive dimension, and an 'epistemic distance'[220] as its counterpart in the transitive dimension, which the attacked model fails to accommodate. This can be interpreted as a critical shot against the idea that people and society perpetually create and recreate each other in a dialectical process switching back and forth between two moments: they are not separate entities that interact externally (which, in the later terminology of *Dialectic*, could be an

[217] PON, p.36.

[218] PON, p.35.

[219] 'Society is only present in human action, but human action always expresses and utilizes some or other social form. Neither can, however, be identified with, reduced to, explained in terms of, or reconstructed from the other. There is an ontological hiatus between society and people, as well as a mode of connection (viz. transformation) (…)'. (PON, p.40).

[220] 'The epistemic distance established (…) between society and people also indicates, at least schematically, a way in which substance can be given to the celebrated Marxian proposition that "people make history, but not under conditions of their choice".' (PON, p.80).

instance of ontological extensionalism), nor are they at one moment one thing (say, people) and another thing (say, society) at another moment in a continuous transmutation.

Bhaskar seems to have carried the gist of this approach over into his dialectical phase, but the idea we see in the formulation in PON, i.e. the idea that the targeted inadequate model is *dialectical*, and the implication that Bhaskar's own model, the TMSA is not, seems to have been resting on an underdeveloped notion of dialectic. This arguably has risen from the lack of the concepts of 'hiatus in duality', 'entity relationism', 'holistic causality' and 'totality', the latter being understood as emergent structure, which would be introduced only later in *Dialectic*.

It is worth noting that some critical realists, without appealing to the emplacement of these relations into the deepened and widened landscape of dialectic developed in the later works of Bhaskar, have described them as 'dialectical'. Douglas Porpora, for example, writing on 'social structure' in *The Dictionary of Critical Realism*, says: 'The TMSA essentially posits a dialectical relation between social structure and individual human agency along the lines of Marx's (1852) famous observation to the effect that people make their history but not under conditions of their own making'. This seems to align with the remarks of Andrew Collier, who professes to be 'completely convinced about the transformational model of social activity', on basic critical realism being 'already dialectical': 'I don't like that phrase [dialectical critical realism] really, (…) one [reason] is that I actually think the earlier work is dialectical as well'. But then we have the later Bhaskar's self-critical comment that his earlier conceptualizations of the TMSA were *insufficiently* dialectical.[221]

We should be cautious not to conflate the pairs of the individual and the collective, people and society, and agency and structure, as all terms refer to different things related differently, and not

[221] 'Significantly [the possibility of a dislocated dialectics of structure and agency] portends the negative (and other) generalizations of the TMSA, which, in my initial formulations of it, still bore the imprint of ontological monovalence', (DPF, p.142).

treat ideas pertaining to one as equally applicable to the other. That is, there is the possibility that the Bhaskar of *Dialectic* might have retained the idea we see in PON that *people and the society* are not dialectically related, while offering, on the contrary, a dialectical relationship between *structure and agency*, but a more plausible explanation would be that it was only after the dialectical turn that Bhaskar started thinking of emergence in terms of totality, reached the idea of a totality that can, without contradiction, allow identity-in-difference, unity-in-diversity, hiatus-in-duality, and saw the notion of totality understood as such an integral part of any dialectical schema purporting to explain human agency, society, and in even more general terms, human being and being at large. This could be described as a natural progression from 1M relations of non-identity and sheer alterity, which basic critical realism could be subsumed under, to 3L relations of holistic causality and totality. It is crucial to remember that such a progression does not entail the jettisoning of 1M relations in favour of those in 3L, such that the distinctions between the terms of pairs in question are dissolved into a congruent whole (which, in the concrete context we are dealing with, would be a backslide into reification, social constructivism, etc.): the upshot of the later formulations is rather that the notion of totality, once opened (in contrast to its Hegelian closure), and once room is granted for absence, distance and negativity, is consistent with the idea that parts can form wholes that are qualitatively different from what only a quantitative summation would produce.

It could be argued that Engels in his dialectics, which he conceived as 'the science of interconnections', was aiming to achieve something like this with the notions of the 'law of transformation of quantity into quality and vice versa' and 'the law of the interpenetration of opposites', but fell short due to the lack of the concepts of structure (even a heap of sand is qualitatively different from a randomly –why not include abstractly?– summated sand –imagine one particle of sand being in the western shores of Turkey and another in the eastern shores of Greece–, which obviously does not necessarily make a heap, but this is only due to the heap's particles being *organized* and related, even in the most provisional manner, in the way of a heap) and emergence

that would bring about the intended results.[222] It is only an enclosed conception of totality which allows for no distance and difference within its parts that rejects the dialecticality of such relations, and arguably, this lack of absence and negativity within the notion of totality is exactly what Bhaskar meant when he characterized his earlier framing of the TMSA as marked by ontological monovalence.

The radical expansion of this level and its radical penetration into the constitution of agents is one of the key novelties of *Dialectic*, and is the starting point of Bhaskar's later spiritual works, the philosophy of meta-reality, where it is extended to its limits.[223]

Alethia and Totality at Work: Powers, Capacities and Eudaimonia

The infinity and openness of totality understood as such, with its capacity to accommodate distance, difference and absence make it possible to see society as just one sub-totality in greater circles and deeper levels of being. This breaks away from both the idea that outside the realm of society (once it is granted that it is structured with the entailing properties of relative endurance, relative order, mechanisms and causal powers, including relations that are to some degree necessary) there lies sheer chaos, on the one hand, and on the other, the idea that the universe is a monolithic block, any

[222] See his "Dialectics of Nature", ch.2, Marxists Internet Archive, accessed December 1, 2021, https://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1883/don/ch02.htm/.

[223] Even in the face of a lot of harsh criticism from critical realists both inside and outside academic circles for the so-called 'spiritual turn' in his intellectual trajectory, Bhaskar never ceased to assert the continuity between the dialectical and metarealist phases of his thought. Indeed, he even met the denomination of 'spiritual turn' with the mild qualification that his dialectical works had always already carried spiritual attributes and no substantial change in direction (as connoted by the word 'turn') had to be initiated. For the criticisms and debate in question, see, e.g., Sean Creaven, *Against the Spiritual Turn: Marxism, Realism, and Critical Theory* (London: Routledge, 2014), and Gary MacLennan, "From East to West: A Book Too Far?," *The Website for Critical Realism*, 2000, http://www.criticalrealism.com/archive/gmac_abtf.html/; and the heated discussions in the Critical Realism Mailing List shortly following the publication of *From the East to the West* (where Bhaskar introduced spiritual themes and eastern philosophical references explicitly for the first time, under the new rubric 'transcendental dialectical critical realism, which would later be dropped in favour of the new concept, the philosophy of 'metareality') which can be found at https://lists.csbs.utah.edu/pipermail/critical-realism/, especially in the archived threads of the year 2000. For Bhaskar's response to the 'spiritual turn' narrative, ECS p.144: 'I sometimes refer to my spiritual turn as 'so called' because I believe that my philosophy has been strongly spiritual all along in its drive to overcome dualism, alienation and split in practice as well as in theory'.

apparent differentiation within which must be illusionary. But an even more threatening idea for an ethics would be the idea that since any human agency is conceivable only by virtue of social structure, or in other terms, since the individual is permeated through and through by society, ethics would be conceivable only in the form of politics. This conflation would be an illicit reduction even if politics is understood broadly enough (and rightly so) to pertain, among other things, to economics, sexual relations and the like.

Let us get into this demarcation problem in a bit more detail. It is important to dispense with the coarse restriction that ethics can pertain only to actions or characters of agents as individuals, and politics only to relations between large social groups identified in one way or another as wholes. If we pursue the MELD line of thinking, any conception of ethics narrower than the study of good and bad will tend to push back against its boundaries due to the irrepressibility of the third level of totality, and either create philosophical *aporia*s due to its inner tensions or break away into the broader conception; and if we pursue the TMSA line of thinking, politics can refer to activities that transform or reproduce social relations of power, which are internally related to the agents who carry out this sort of activities.

In SRHE, the book immediately preceding *Dialectic*, Bhaskar has defined politics as

> 'most abstractly as any practice oriented to the transformation of the conditions of human action; more concretely, as practices oriented to or conducted in the context of struggles and conflicts over the development, nature and distribution of the facilities (and circumstances) of human action; more starkly, as practices oriented to the transformation of the structured sets of social relations within which particular social structures operate and particular social activities occur.' (pp.118-119).

One can sense a weak but distinct 'downward' pull in this definition toward what in Marxist terminology would correspond to 'base' in the 'base-superstructure' metaphor[224] (note the words

[224] For a useful survey including canonical quotations from Marx and Engels and later theoretical developments, see Larrain, "Base and Superstructure," in *A Dictionary of Marxist Thought*, ed. Tom Bottomore (Blackwell Publishers, 2001). For Andrew Collier's take on the issue, see his Andrew Collier, *Marx: A Beginner's Guide* (Oxford: Oneworld, 2008), 48–55.

'conditions', 'resources', 'circumstances' and 'facilities'), but the object of political practice is not specified as necessarily the basis of economic activity, it is the basis of activity as such. We can read making room for this level of generality as a deliberate effort to avoid reducing the notion of emancipatory social praxis to class struggles. But still it was *Dialectic* where the concept of *power* within the context of politics first appeared in the Bhaskarian corpus, with the differentiation of a 'power 1', in the broadest possible sense of the term, denoting the capacity to change, from a 'power 2', which carries the typically negative connotations analysed under the rubric of 'generalized master-slave relations'[225]. Once again, we should keep in mind the distinction between abstract differentiation and hypostatized dichotomy: as Andrew Collier rather playfully points out through his concept of 'Power 1.5',[226] there is a host of situations where the boundaries delineating the second concept are blurred or are transitive. Nevertheless, *pace* Collier's treatment of Bhaskar's 'power 1' as 'almost a synonym of freedom, rather than an antonym', thus forming an opposition to 'power 2', and by implication presenting the terms as if there is a spectrum with powers 1 and 2 on each opposing end, it is clear that the power 2 is a species of, or one could perhaps say parasitic on, power 1, which is in and of itself neither positively nor negatively charged. Having a conceptual placeholder without such baggage is essential for DCR's overall ethico-political project of *eudaimonia*, that is, human flourishing, which necessarily involves not only acknowledging the reality of certain human powers (some of which are conditions of possibility of the intentional agency required to bring about a *eudaimonic* society), but the very objective this project sets for itself also involves the actual *development* of certain human powers. This is, of course, not unique to dialectical critical realism: it is one of the defining characteristics of the *eudaimonian* ethics in ancient Greek philosophy, most notably that of Aristotle, whose *Nicomachean Ethics* and *Eudemian*

[225] 'Power 1 is the transformative capacity intrinsic to the concept of action as such, whereas power 2 is the capacity to get one's way against either the overt wishes and/or the real interests of others in virtue of structures of exploitation, domination, subjugation and control (…)'. (DPF, p.378).

[226] Andrew Collier, "Power1.5 and the Weakness of Liberalism," *Journal of Critical Realism* 6, no. 1 (2007): 111–16.

Ethics give an account of morality that is primarily based on the cultivation of various excellences of character through the habitual exercise of certain human capacities, guided by the power of reasoning.

The idea of the development of human powers is also a feature of Marx's *politics,* which is, in the philosophical anthropology of Marx, closely connected to the concept of *need.* Human beings do not only need the material necessities such as food and shelter, which would secure their survival, they also have a second-order need to exercise their physical and intellectual (including creative) powers in the form of the (generally social) labour they exert in the process of attaining the first-order necessities, and human flourishing consists in the qualified growth in, and rational mobilization of such powers. The fulfilment of *both* types of human needs depends on the removal of social obstacles such as the capitalist relations of production, which puts *politics* at the forefront of the struggles around human flourishing. The post-capitalist social order Marxian thought envisions is, as expressed in the later writings of Engels, one where 'productive labour, instead of being a means of subjugating men, will become a means of their emancipation; by offering each individual the opportunity to develop all his faculties, physical and mental, in all directions and exercise them to the full-in which, therefore, productive labour will become a pleasure instead of being a burden'.[227] Universal freedom is thus not formulated as relying on a compromise of the individual's particular needs in favour of a larger population: the *social* character of the obstacles that thwart individual flourishing is precisely the thread, in both Marxian and critical realist thought, that links individual flourishing (the traditional home of eudaimonian ethics) to social emancipation (the traditional home of mass politics): 'Only in community [with others has each] individual the means of cultivating his gifts in all directions; only in the community, therefore, is personal freedom possible'.[228]

[227] Friedrich Engels, 'On the Division of Labour in Production', in Tucker, *The Marx-Engels Reader*, p.719.

[228] Marx and Engels, *The German Ideology*, ibid., p.197.

An ethico-political standpoint based on such an Aristotelian 'development of powers' approach, on the one hand, and a Marxian stipulation of the structural transformation (viz. a revolution) necessary to achieve it, on the other, tie together arbitrarily dichotomized notions of freedom. The distinction between the positive 'freedom from' and the negative 'freedom to' conceptions of autonomy cannot be statically unrelenting[229], since there is a dialectical flow: positive flourishing / developing human capacities(freedom to) *resides in* the removal of ills conceived as obstacles (freedom from), whether they are material (at the level of transactions with nature), social (at the level of inter-subjective or social-structural relations) or psychological (at the level of the stratification of the personality), and the removal of ills might demand a stretch of the boundaries of existing human powers (which must be viewed, in accordance with a dynamic and historicized account of human nature, at least in principle as amenable to budging, but in accordance also with the reality principle, perhaps finitely so), in the form of actualizing hitherto untapped potential, invoking creativity.

Freedom involves not only the abolishment of discrimination based on race or gender, or the exploitation intrinsic to class-based society, but the availability of resources (including education) and structurally supported incitement for the exercise and development of certain powers and active enjoyment of certain practices. This is linked also with the notion of the 'presence of the past' in *Dialectic*: abolishing chess titles and tournaments that are exclusive to boys and men (the negative – freedom from) does not nearly suffice to address the issue of the sedimented and ossified millennia-long subjugation of women; emancipation happens only when more and more girls and women actually learn, play and keep playing chess (the positive – freedom to). Bhaskar generalizes the necessity of such a 'positive' direction in this flow as the indispensability of utopian thinking for emancipatory projects.

[229] '(…) there is an *equivocity* of freedom from and freedom to (and Isaiah Berlin's celebrated distinction appears as two poles of ultimately the one concept)'. (DPF, p.242).

Indeed, one could say, the content of Bhaskar's relatively unfulfilled projection in SRHE, that 'a transcendental realist ontology requires, it will be seen, as much readjustment in ethics as in epistemology', when taken with his stipulation, again in SRHE, that 'as ontology stands to epistemology, so anthropology stands to ethics; indeed one could say that anthropology just is the ontology of ethics', must involve, at least in part, precisely work on (the development of) *human* powers and dispositions, paralleling the work of Harre and Madden that carried the concept of causal powers to the fronts of the domain of philosophy of natural science[230], which was a seminal achievement for contemporary scientific realism, and a precursor of basic critical realism.[231]

We can derive two conclusions from the significance of the concept of power. It specifies, on the one hand, (1) the reason (a) dialectical critical realism turns to the ancient Greek paradigms of happiness, utilizing the concepts of *eudaimonia*, *phronesis*, and *aletheia*, and the reason (b) later Bhaskar designates virtue theory basically as 'the way to go'; and on the other hand, (2) specifies what CR has to offer for virtue theory. The possibility of a *development* of powers presupposes a distinction between the potential and the actual, so that the actually existing entity in question has the leeway (within the 'region', so to speak, lying between the two domains), for qualitative and/or quantitative change.[232] The distinctions drawn between the domains of the real, actual, and empirical, and the ensuing critiques of actualism (collapsing the potential onto the actual), and

[230] Rom Harré and Edward H. Madden, *Causal Powers: A Theory of Natural Necessity* (Oxford: B. Blackwell, 1975).

[231] A relevant biographical detail here is that Rom Harre was Roy Bhaskar's academic supervisor during his DPhil studies at Oxford University. Although the two have later diverged intellectually (see ch. 'Critical Realism and Ethnomethodolgy: Debate with Rom Harre', in Bhaskar's *From Science to Emancipation*), Bhaskar has described their initial relationship as 'intellectual love at first sight'. (FCR, p.31)

[232] 'All process involves a distinction between the potential and the actual, and the potential is the seat of the nisus in virtue of which it is forcing its way towards actuality. (…) It is widely recognised that a process of becoming is conceivable only if that which is yet unrealised is affecting the process as a goal towards which it is directed.' Collingwood (As seen in the perfectly befitting epigraph of Alan Norrie's *Dialectic and Difference*).

empiricism (collapsing both the potential and the actual onto human experience) in the depth-ontology of critical realism are perfectly suitable for accommodating this framework of developing powers, and can help demonstrate the untenability of a long-standing meta-ethical 'rival' of virtue theory, utilitarianism of a hedonistic cast, to the extent that it can be illustrated to rest on an impoverished ontology flattened onto the surface of the experiential.[233]

Politics, then, can operate as a direct exercise of power, or at a distance, e.g. in the form of taking cue, inspiration or encouragement, can be an immediate and definite outcome or a lagged wave, can be an outburst or gradual discharge, can be concentrated in points of contact or dispersed over networks, and can be a conscious effort oriented towards transforming or maintaining relations of power, or can cause such transformation/preservation as an unintended consequence. And power, which normally means the capacity to bring about (or resist) change, can here be contextualized, neutrally as 'the socially structured capacity to transform the world (…), [including], of course, the capacity to maintain it in a particular state when it would otherwise have tended to change'[234], or more loosely, exert influence on it; and negatively, as the master-slave relations of 'domination, exploitation, subjugation and control'.[235] Here the question more relevant for our purposes is how politics can relate to the individual-collective pair.

While the dialectic between agency and (social) structure entails that the relationship between ethics and politics must also be dialectical, suggesting that no ethics nor politics can be conceivable without a more holistically conceived ethico-politics, the infinity and open-endedness that totality in

[233] Ruth Groff's latest work attacking 'the myth of metaphysical neutrality', analyzing the unwittingly held metaphysical commitments of political philosophies informed by Mill and Kant has made a considerable contribution to the battle going on in this front. However, her emphasis has been on political philosophy (see especially ch.3, on Mill's Humean metaphysics, in Ruth Groff, *Ontology Revisited: Metaphysics in Social and Political Philosophy* [London and New York: Routledge, 2013]), not moral philosophy, and work remains to be done to excavate the ontological underpinnings of Hume's utilitarian ethics in specific.

[234] *A Meeting of Minds*, p.21

[235] DPF, p.143.

its broadest sense enjoys over and above society and culture entails that there is in this dialectical relation between ethics and politics an *overarching* of the former term of the pair.

Bhaskar builds the political-ethical relation by granting explanatory primacy of the political over the ethical, and normative primacy of the ethical over the political:

> 'Our "vehicular thrownness" establishes the explanatory primacy (in the EA) of the political over the ethical, while the extended argument of this chapter from absence to referential detachment to the logic of scientific discovery and alethic truth, entailing, when consistently pursued, the conception of social science as emancipatory axiology, suggests the normative primacy (in the IA) of the ethical over the political. (This is the constellational unity [and fluidity] of the ethical and [into] the political within the political.) My project is normative.'

But a distinction between actually existing morality and a morality that encompasses its full potentiality –a distinction that is lacking in *Dialectic*, which is remedied shortly after in *Plato Etc.*- , a 'Dmr' (domain of the moral real), to borrow from Bhaskar's antecedent Dr-Da-De (domains of the real, actual and empirical) schema, might give us a more elaborate picture here: the political enjoys an explanatory primacy only over the actually existing, and with further qualification, ideologically dominant morality in society.

Conclusion: Towards a dialectical critical realist critique of deontology, virtue theory and consequentialism

One advantage of DCR ethics is that it is not grounded in optimistic speculation about human nature or the way it may develop in the future, but on the conditions of possibilities, and implications of, certain activities that are already formative of the kind of things we are, such as discursive (including, among others, linguistic and communicative) and social practices.

It should be stressed that the criterion of universalizability does not suffer from the egocentricity of the 'golden rule', which presupposes what is good for oneself must be good for everyone. The logic is as follows: single, concrete remarks can be rational only in so far as they can be grounded, and the process of grounding simply means getting into deeper levels of reality, or more universal features of singulars; it is only in virtue of such contact with this ground that a concretely singular remark makes sense, and once this sort of ground, or this sort of universal is tapped, now only a theory-theory or theory-practice contradiction can prevent other concrete singulars who are similarly grounded, or are embedded in the same or similar grounds, or are singularizations of similar or the same universals to be true and to be committed to in practice.

Bhaskar gives the example of smoking. 'Thus take the simple judgement 'smoking harms health': we can postulate the transition→ the harming of health as such is wrong→absence of health is an ill→ ills such as that, which function as a constraint on life, are wrong→ all such constraints should be absented→all constraints, as such, should be absented.'[236] One should reasonably make the 'exhortation' to quit smoking, *if and only if* health is good and ill-health is bad, and this commits one to all activities that cause ill-health, because the grounding moves and the surfacing moves are unstoppable except by ingenuity, bad faith, denial, or ordinary epistemic insufficiency (such as wrong information). This can also be viewed as a reminder of the Socratic call to philosophy: 'the unexamined life is not worth living', the analysis of presuppositions and implications of actions (as much as words), the move from the singular to the universal, from the figure to the ground, just *is* philosophical activity, and this is not only for necessary for deepening evaluative judgements (determining what is 'worth' and not), but also *discovering* new goods, since the *ground* that one taps into throughout this dialectic is being with the capital B, an *infinite* and open-ended totality of totalities, which, at least in principle, can potentially be home to ever newer and better goods. As a side note, it should be mentioned that such infinity and open-endedness do not necessarily indicate

[236] DPF, pp.263-264.

an extensional/temporal boundlessness of the physical universe (which we nevertheless seem to have adequate justification to believe); it can also take the form of depth: a *tree* can be infinite, a wooden chess piece can be open-ended.

Here it is essential to maintain, against Hegel, the notion of an 'inexpressive' sub-totality: the whole of being is not totally contained, and teleologically expressed in human beings: there is room for absence, hiatus, contradiction etc., and it is precisely the power of human beings to situate themselves as a limited, finite and relatively small part of a larger totality that creates the space for environmental concerns, as opposed to the strictly modernist conception of freedom and human development as resting on the domination and manipulation nature. It is this non-anthropism that expands the domain of ethics from narrowly human, and narrowly presentist concerns.

The problem with abstract/analytical universalization is that it consists of a generalization, not grounding, and on the way back to the singular, discards mediation and multiple determination (it is wrong to tell a lie, but the agent concerned might also find herself in the unfortunate circumstance – a significant mediation– of facing an axe murderer asking the whereabouts of a target). Singularizing and concretizing ethico-political practices, and contextualizing them as learning processes are paramount here. This calls for going through, on the way 'back up' from the ground to the level of the singularity of agents and action situations, a myriad of specifications, mediations, preparations (indicating tensed processuality – one cannot expect excellence from an initiate in any practice at the outset, which establishes *patience* as a necessary pedagogical virtue, to be exhibited by both the master and the apprentice, or the teacher and the student), ordinations, prioritizations, differentiations, limitations (putting as the goal of education the full realization of potential, which is different for everyone, rather than the attainment of predetermined empirical results, which overrides such differences), and potentially rational 'backsliding', all necessary considerations in

the level of practical engagement with the world, which accords the 'concrete' its true meaning. This marks the difference between dialectical and analytical universalization.

It is essential to keep in mind that 'universalization' does not refer to an end-product, but marks a grounding process: it does not stipulate an absolute generalization (horizontally, i.e. encompassing all human beings), or an absolute foundation (vertically, a terminal principle to cover them all). Abstract universalization in the Kantian mould thus lacks what Bhaskar crowns as the 'supreme meta-ethical virtue' of *phronesis,* appreciating the actually prevailing complex nexus of circumstances, and *sophrosyne,* a prerequisite for successfully juggling the competing aspects of the totality of a multi-faceted life. Learning processes, the presence of the past, substantial change all involve a bracketing of analytical reason, and this is what an absolute formalism, e.g. Kantian 'no-slacks-given' kind of ethics, which infamously forbids lying even to an axe-murderer, overlooks: 'My ethical naturalism implies that an epistemological dialectic will be necessary for the transition to the realm of freedom, which paradigmatically violates norms of purely analytical consistency. In addition, T/P inconsistency is characteristic of all formative/learning/maturation/developmental processes' (DPF, p.264).

Let's dwell some more on these two important concepts Bhaskar adopts from ancient Greek ethics. In *Dialectic, sophrosyne,* with a slight departure from its ancient Greek deployments in which the senses of moderation, temperance, continence, and self-control are more dominant, pertains to the ability to keep an eye on the whole. Again, chess could provide useful analogies here. On a simplified account, *phronesis* is dealing with tactics, *sophrosyne* with strategy. On a more complex account, we could say, if *phronesis* is dealing with the problems of tactical urgencies, figuring out which positional features are to be attended to, and which competing strategical principles are most relevant to the particular position on the board ('rooks belong on open files' but also 'rooks belong behind passed pawns'), *sophrosyne* requests one not to get fixated on immediate skirmishes on

limited parts of the board at the expense of the whole position (e.g. watch out for getting into tunnel-vision on the mating attack on the kingside and address the long-term weakness on the queenside which might be a counter-attacking resource for the opponent). *Phronesis* is thus the particularizing virtue, while *sophrosyne* is the totalizing one.

One feature of the ancient Greek virtue theory tradition that makes it a more suitable ally for dialectical critical realism than both Kantian deontology and Millean utilitarianism is that it emphasizes the practical skill-building aspect of morality. This curbs ethico-political projects through the notions of the reality principle (acknowledgement of limits), the primacy of practice (one becomes virtuous by routinely *doing* virtuous deeds, as opposed to merely attending Aristotle's lectures[237], or conducting a literature review on virtue theory for a doctoral thesis; it requires action[238]), processualization (it takes time, and can be described as a *development* of powers), autonomy in the sense of self-determination (one cannot build the skills for someone else), positive freedom in the sense of empowerment (building a skill is developing a *power*) and a *realism* in the sense that its ambitions rest not on the domain of the empirical (pleasure, or measurable/quantifiable outcome), but on closing, as much as possible, and in the relevant respects, the gap between the domains of the real and the actual, where lies unactualized human potential. Compare this 'practical' aim of ethics in the Aristotelian vein with G.E. Moore's symptomatic declaration that 'the direct object of Ethics is knowledge not practice'.[239] This is the inevitable

[237] '[T]he present inquiry does not aim at theoretical knowledge like the others (for we are inquiring not in order to know what excellence is, but in order to become good, since otherwise our inquiry would have been of no use)', Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, 1103b26, *Complete Works*, J. Barnes edition.

[238] 'A short while ago, [God] wanted you to be at leisure, to talk with yourself, to write about these matters, and to read, listen, and prepare yourself. You've had time enough for that. Now he tells you, "The time has come for you to proceed to the contest, show us what you've learned and how you've trained. How long, then, are you going to carry out exercises on your own?"' Epictetus, *Discourses, Fragments, Handbook*, Book 4.4 [29], trans. Robin Hard (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014). Epictetus (AD.55-135) obviously belongs to *Roman* stoicism, not ancient Greek (although he was Greek and did teach in Greece), but is firmly within the virtue ethics tradition, and arguably practiced philosophy in the Socratic paradigm. For pressing the latter case, see especially ch.3 in Anthony Arthur Long, *Epictetus: A Stoic and Socratic Guide to Life* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2002).

[239] Moore, *Principia Ethica*.

consequence of ethical anti-naturalism: the separation of values from facts entails the separation of theory from practice.

The educational drive in dialectical critical realism can carry us even further in a critique of utilitarianism in the hedonistic vein. Bhaskar puts to work the very basic realist (anti-positivist) idea of the gap between experience and reality in his concept of the 'education of desire'. The *perceived* interests and needs of agents (imagine a kid in a perceived need of a large bag of candy), which necessarily inform their *wants*, do not necessarily overlap with their *real* interests and needs. Such a disconnect ensures frustration even when the wants are satisfied. Desire must thus be accordingly transformed towards real interests and needs, taking into account the reality principle (covering facts of circumstance and external limit) and four-planar social being (essential species-nature – what foods are nutritious for human beings?– plus what is reasonably attainable in actually existing society). Hedonistic utilitarianism fails on this front because its identification of the good with pleasure cannot survive outside the domain of the empirical, which can only account for a *subset* of the real conditions of human existence.

But utilitarianism can take non-hedonistic forms, and consequentialism, the broadest description of the metaethical tradition associated with John Stuart Mill, has to be dealt with separately. The main thrusts of a critical realist charge against consequentialism consist in acknowledging the open-systemic nature of the ontology of morality, and the depth-realism of the stratified personality, registering the import of 'unintended consequences' and 'unconscious motivations' in the fourfold negative matrix of the transformational model of social activity (the other two terms being unacknowledged conditions and tacit skills). It is only in closed systems containing omniscient agents that intended consequences have a real chance for regular occurrence, and it is only under those conditions that they can serve as reasonable criteria for judging good and bad action (even purposefully controlled environments are closed systems only in a relevant sense: the failure of a

rocket launch does not refute the physics behind it). This squarely parallels the positivist verification paradigm for scientific knowledge and shares with it the metaphysical ground of Humean event regularity. As the domain of the empirical stands to hedonistic utilitarianism (establishing pleasure, which is part of human experience, as the basis of morality), the domain of the actual stands to consequentialism (operating at the level of events, and establishing results, that is, effects of actualized tendencies, as the basis of morality). This does not mean that the practising utilitarian or the consequentialist cannot conduct good activity. To pursue the philosophy of science analogy for a bit more, we know from the history of science that positivistically inclined natural scientists have been able to put out epistemically successful work (although this is only scarcely the case for social scientists). It means just that consequentialism cannot sustain the basis of its judgemental rationality (which calls for an ontological realism, as opposed to actualism) under its own terms, that is, without sliding into the positions of its theoretical adversaries and jettisoning its *differentia specifica* (the stronghold of the domain of consequences). It is only virtue theory that operates at the level of structures and powers (human nature) and dispositions (as virtues must properly be understood to be).

An interesting parallel between the epistemology of pragmatism and utilitarian consequentialism can also be drawn, as both are rooted in an actualist ontology. The fundamental question pragmatistic theories of truth wrestle with, which is, to put in a very simple way for expository convenience, ‘is it (a) true because it works or does (b) it work because it is true?’, can be posed to utilitarian consequentialism with a transposition of terms: ‘(a’) is it good because it promotes utility or (b’) does it promote utility because it is good?’ Ontological realists and moral realists tend to side with the second pole ([b] and [b’]) respectively in the two formulations, and any successful critical strike on pragmatism in epistemology should hold purchase on utilitarian consequentialism in metaethics. Note that this can be generalized to cover for non-utilitarian consequentialism by inserting the relevant term in place of utility, and also that ontological realism *entails* moral realism.

The ‘holy trinity’ of critical realism, consisting of ontological realism, epistemic relativism and judgemental rationality holds just as much in the context of metaethics as in the context of philosophy of science.

What are the shortcomings of virtue theory, which dialectical critical realism can help overcome? In its Platonic form, it suffers from an epistemologization of morality. Its identification of wisdom with knowledge creates *aporias* for theory-practice transitions, i.e., it cannot sustain a *praxis* (understood as the practical exercise of theory). Stripped to its bones, it commits a version of the epistemic fallacy: its analysis of virtues is systematically transposed to the analysis of the knowledge of virtues[240], which are then unified under knowledge,[241] effectively eliminating the possibility of partial knowledge (which leads to the famous paradox analyzed in *Meno*), and ruling out the possibility of commonly observed phenomena such as the courageous fool. This demand for omniscience is symptomatic of epistemic fallacy in general, as Bhaskar points out in a different context:

> ‘But if you can’t talk about the world apart from our ways of knowing it or our grounds for certain cognitive claims, you will never be able to talk about anything, (…) you are never going to have any local, sectoral, separate or particular knowledge. For if you can’t establish a conclusion about anything apart from our way of proving or establishing it, then ultimately the only knowledge you can have will involve the whole, indeed possibly everything, and indeed the process of everything. If we are going to have knowledge of particular things or of any discrete subject matter, we must be able to (and regularly do) detach the (ontological) conclusion of some epistemic investigation from the epistemic investigation itself.’[242]

This puts too much strain on knowledge, it at once carries the burden of practice (knowledge of the fearful amounts to practically facing it) and has to account for the whole (knowledge of one thing requires knowledge of everything), which virtually generates a paralysis in practice and scepticism

[240] ‘(…) courage is the knowledge of the fearful and the hopeful’ – Laches 199b, Plato, *Complete Works*.
[241] ‘(…) courage is the knowledge not just of the fearful and the hopeful, but (…) it would be the knowledge of practically all goods and evils put together’ – Laches 199c-d, ibid.
[242] ECS, pp.26-27.

in theory, into which it is perhaps no surprise that historically the Academy has degenerated in a few generations' time after Plato's death, under the leadership of Arcesilaus. Later Hume would pay homage to the sceptical New Academy.[243]

For Plato, theory-practice transitions were never a problem, as, in the example of the virtue of courage, it was sufficient to know what is to be rightly feared and what is not in order to *be* courageous. For dialectical critical realism, such transitions and relations *are* problematic, since even though the 'quasi-propositionality of practice' and practicality of theory-production are acknowledged, theory and practice ultimately cannot be *fully* transposed into each other without loss. Problematicity does not mean impossibility, however: they do concede to solutions, which require practical *work*. On both the individual (imagine deciding on what to cook for dinner but then facing the daunting task of actually getting off the couch) and social levels (it would not suffice for everyone to magically wake up, e.g., as a socialist one morning to bring about a socialist society, it would require among a myriad other things a massive redistribution of material sources), it takes practical work to realize ideas in the world. And in order to catalyze praxis and sustain one's practice consistently in theory, it takes the theoretical work of producing concepts such as *hiatus* (in this case between the dialectical pair of theory and practice) and overarching (of practice over theory).[244] This is how dialectical theory can underlabour for emancipatory activity.

Dialectical critical realism does hold on to the doctrine of the unity of the truth and the good, which was arguably what was at stake with Platonic philosophy, concurrently with the *primacy of practice* without the identification of virtue with knowledge. It does this by introducing a non-propositionally conceived notion of truth, viz. *alethia*, that binds truth *ontologically* to ontology

[243] See part iii, section VII of his *An Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding*, ed. Peter Millican (New York: Oxford University Press, 2007).

[244] For a useful explication of the difficult concept of 'hiatus in duality', see ch. 4, esp. the sub-section titled 'Duality, hiatus-in-duality and perspectival switch' in Norrie's *Dialectic and Difference*).

(alienation is *untrue* to and of human being). The question is, of course, whether these can be accomplished without *aporia*s of their own. I have argued that it can and has been, but a much deeper is analysis is needed. I hope at least to have shown that it is worth going down that path. It is problematic (not inconsistent) to hold on both to realism in the form of an anti-anthropism and a non-propositional conception of truth, viz. alethia. Does *Dialectic* exchange one form of idealism, that is, the Platonic identification of virtues with knowledge of virtues, with another by sneaking an epistemological category (of truth) into ontology? Indeed, *alethia* is perhaps the most contested notion that Bhaskar has put to use in his *Dialectic*.[245] I am sympathetic towards it on the grounds that it suggests a directionality towards deep grounding, rather than identity with, being. Nevertheless, Plato, even though his thesis on the *sufficiency* of knowledge for the good life is riddled with *aporia*, has successfully demonstrated that knowledge is a *necessary* condition of morality. We owe it to his Socrates to realize that ethics is indispensably pervasive in human existence, and that the moral good ultimately springs from truth.

With the Aristotelian form of virtue theory, much more weight is put on practice, exercise and activity, and virtues are defined as what under the critical realist rubric could be called *dispositions to act*, while wisdom depends on the acquirement and habitual performance of them. Conceived as such, virtues can be said to have, again in the terminology of *Dialectic*, a 'theoretico-practical duality'. This partially rectifies the epistemologization of morality in Plato (although ultimately an overstress on contemplative activity and theoretical reason persists in Aristotle, reflecting the absence of the need to work that marks his position in the ruling class), and more attention is paid to the biophysical constitution and embodiment of human being, which can accommodate the significance of material resources for human happiness, and the phenomenon of *akrasia.* These are important achievements over Plato, for whom virtue (equaling knowledge) is sufficient for well-

[245] See, for instance, Ruth Groff, "The Truth of the Matter: Roy Bhaskar's Critical Realism and the Concept of Alethic Truth," *Philosophy of the Social Sciences* 30, no. 3 (2000): 407–35.

being, and who dismisses the possibility of *akrasia* because he cannot account for 'springs of action' (in CR terminology) other than knowledge (which is the hinge his identification of knowledge with wisdom turns on). But Aristotelian virtue theory's conception of its real basis, viz. human nature, bears an unqualified essentialism and individualism due to being inadequately historicized and socialized, respectively. This can be remedied by the DCR notion of four-planar social being, which Bhaskar uses interchangeably with human nature, in virtue of being dynamized –allowing substantial change– and stratified –covering the level of social structure–; and the 3L notion of totality, which not only accommodates agency-social structure relations in a way that dissolves individualism but also has the potential to go deeper and wider in ontology, situating society only as sub-totality within a greater (sub-)totality, expanding the real basis of virtue theory into being at large. Thus, effectively, the ontology of virtue theory, under the hands of dialectical critical realism, becomes not only the natural essence of human beings, but being as such, including nature, which in turn includes human nature. Environmental ethics cannot be sustained without such a radical expansion, even stopping at the level of nature (as opposed to being) would not suffice, as the problem now simply shifts to that of grounding environmental concerns, which paves the way into deeper realms, and, again, the dialectic goes on.

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