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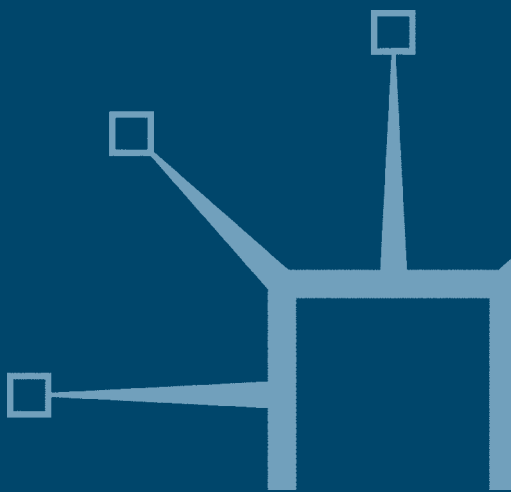
Realism, Philosophy and Social Science

Kathryn Dean, Jonathan Joseph, John Michael Roberts and Colin Wight



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Realism, Marxism and Method

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The contemporary social sciences are in a state of theoretical fragmentation. A dizzying array of approaches jostle for attention, each making grander and often increasingly radical claims about the nature of human life and the best method of studying it. The roots of this fragmentation lie in the 1960s, when a deeply held sense of dissatisfaction with mainstream social theory led to the search for alternatives to the positivism that had come to triumph, particularly in the United States, following the end of the Second World War (Wolin 1972). The result of these endeavours is that the contemporary landscape of social science differs from earlier eras in both qualitative and quantitative terms.[1] Quantitatively, the sheer number of different approaches to social science today makes it almost impossible for any scholar to claim expertise in them all. Qualitatively, the depth of disagreement among the various approaches is such as to render virtually impossible the attempt to map the contours of contemporary social theory. Indeed, it is often difficult to say that the theories are attempting to address the same object, or even engaged in the same enterprise. To complicate matters further, theorists of a post-structural or postmodern inclination will reject the very notion of an 'object' on the grounds that it essentialises and endows with a spurious fixity what is, in fact, in flux.[2] The combined effect of these developments is to inhibit meaningful debate across theoretical divides. Where cross-theoretical debate does occur it tends towards strident attacks on opposing theories as a means of defending one's chosen approach. In such monological 'debates', we believe many of the most important issues – agency, emancipation, science and method – are either overlooked or treated in a misleadingly reductive manner.

This book is an attempt to reclaim some of these issues and to explore their implications for contemporary social science. Underlying this

attempt is a shared concern to explore the relationship between social science and social practice. As critical social theorists, our interest in social science is part of our interest in emancipatory social practice so we want to pose the questions: can social science be the engine of social change; if so, what are its limits; and how should it go about achieving its aims?

Having been brought together through our shared concern with the specific issues named above, we begin, in this book, to address these issues from the viewpoint of a broadly defined critical realism enhanced by an equally broadly defined Marxism. Our overall concern is the relationship between social science and philosophy. Our shared belief in the continuing importance of philosophy's contribution to the practice of social science rests on the sense that some central problems remain inadequately addressed. These problems include the question of the material–ideal dichotomy and a failure to recognise or adequately theorise the socio-historical nature of the human world. As an important part of these discussions we reintroduce the question of ontology which has been for too long overlooked by philosophers of social science.[3] Our critical engagement with Marxism relates in part to our belief that it remains relevant to elaborating an adequate position on these problems.

We differ, however, on what the relevantly constructive aspects of Marxism are, and on their implications for the practice of social theorising. Likewise, while we all insist on the importance of a serious engagement with philosophy at all levels of social research we disagree on exactly how that engagement is to be put into practice. The differences between the authors clearly surface in the individual chapters and we explore them in greater detail in the conclusion via an open dialogue. In many respects, the differences are the most illuminating aspects of the book since they allow us to highlight the significant and important issues that drive theoretical debate forward. The differences also demonstrate the absence of consensus regarding the nature of realism. However, this absence of consensus does not here prevent the sharing of authorial commitments and it is in light of these shared commitments that the debate on difference becomes possible.

The realism we adopt is critical in two senses. First, it seeks the attainment of a more just and freer world than we presently inhabit and to this end works to develop an explanatory critique of key aspects of contemporary life. Second, it distinguishes itself from the naïve realism of empiricism or positivism. Indeed, it is in the difference between naïve and critical realism that the possibility of an explanatory critique of human practices emerges and that the potential for emancipatory

action guided in part by explanatory critique may be realised (Collier 1994). An explanatory critique is one which presents arguments that there is a gap between the real and our experience of the real and that this gap tends to promote systemic misunderstandings regarding the nature and significance of everyday experiences. More on these difficult questions later. It must suffice for now to say that we all see the label 'realism' as indicating our belief that there exists an objective world independent of our ideas of it and that the world as experienced is not co-terminous with that objective world, hence the need for science. We also maintain the (non-reductive) materialist premise that ideas are essentially specific *forms* of the material world, or, they are qualitatively specific material social entities in their own right which, when taking the form of science, can tell us something meaningful (relevant to effective social practice) about 'the world out there'. Thus we reject any attempt to divorce the ideational and material dimensions of social life. For us, both aspects are a necessary condition of all human life and therefore of social explanation.

This point about the ontological and theoretical inseparability of the ideal and material in human life is embedded in Roy Bhaskar's early critical realism, which began life as a philosophy of natural science (Bhaskar 1978).[4] In this book, Bhaskar's critical realism constitutes the shared horizon – along with a shared commitment to Marxism – within which different viewpoints are taken up and elaborated by the authors. In looking towards that shared horizon, we agree that Bhaskar has recently taken a wrong turn in that, in his work on meta-reality, he has displaced science by spiritualism (Bhaskar 2000, 2002a, 2002b). Our commitment to Marxism relates to our conviction that it can provide a useful corrective to the fanciful and idealistic excesses of Bhaskar's purported spiritual enrichment (which we see as a displacement) of realist social science. (Bhaskar's 'spiritual turn' is explored in some detail by Wight in Chapter 2.) At the same time, in insisting on the centrality of philosophy as an underlabourer of the social sciences, Bhaskar's early critical realism serves to counter one Marxist tendency, encouraged by Marx's own comments on the inadequacies of idealist philosophy, to deny the usefulness of philosophy altogether.[5]

This denial of philosophy's relevance to the social sciences is to be found also in positivist philosophy of science which follows the natural sciences in seeking a sharp break from philosophy. The perception here is that the natural sciences only truly emerged as the sciences we know today once they had detached themselves from speculative philosophy. Natural scientists rarely reflect on what it is they do, preferring instead

to simply do it (whatever 'it' may be). It is almost inconceivable to think of any of the natural sciences fundamentally changing their practices as a result of developments from within the philosophy of science. If anything, when the philosophy of science conflicts with the practices of scientists the assumption of scientists is always that the philosophers have got it wrong.[6] The positivist anti-philosophical stance is expressed in a preoccupation with methodological rigour and the relegation of philosopy to the role of concept-maintenance (sharpening the tools in the social science tool-box, as it were). The demise of positivism (the announcement of whose death may, however, have been premature) has been accompanied by a crisis of confidence in the social sciences; a crisis expressed in the revitalisation of philosophical debates. Yet, do the social sciences really need philosophy? And if so, what is the precise role of philosophy within social science?

Against the tendency to denigrate philosophy, the authors of this book insist on its indispensability to the practice of social science and all the chapters, in various ways, explore the ramifications of taking philosophy seriously. This is not, however, a book on philosophy. Rather, we are concerned to explore three key themes in relation to the issue of philosophy and social science. First, how has the specific deployment of philosophy within the social sciences shaped the form they take? Second, what, if any, is the relationship between philosophy and the methods employed by social scientists. Third, on what areas of social science can philosophy make the most impact?

The purpose of the remainder of this introduction is to provide the background needed to place the individual chapters. This background is provided by a general discussion of the dichotomous treatment of the social sciences – in terms of explanation or understanding – to be found in philosophies of science and of critical realism's attempt to overcome this dichotomy in its specific account of naturalism. Following an account of critical realism's concern with emancipation and with the role of a critical social science in providing explanatory critiques of everyday life, the chapter pursues the question of method by way of a refutation of charges that the contemporary world is not susceptible to understanding via metaphors of 'depth', 'levels' and so on – that is, metaphors which form an essential part of critical realist philosophy. This refutation takes the form of a critical analysis of ethnographic methods. Finally, we provide a philosophical account of Marx's work which includes a focus on his account of the theory–practice relationship and of the methods of dialectical abstraction capable of conveying and protecting the necessary historicity of human life and, therefore, of the social sciences.

Philosophy and the possibility of a social science

Perhaps the most enduring influence that philosophy has had on the social sciences relates to the question of whether they can indeed be considered sciences. The literature on this question tends to be organised on the basis of the distinction between two kinds of answer classified under positivism and hermeneutics.[7] The term positivism is associated with a naturalism which claims the unity of method of natural and social sciences and which sees the goal of social science to be explanation taking the form of propositions concerning cause/effect relations. The term hermeneutics is associated with an anti-naturalism which claims a radical discontinuity between human and non-human objects of knowledge and which sees the goal of social science, insofar as it accepts it to be possible, as understanding or interpretation. Both positivism and hermeneutics share a (mis)understanding of natural science drawn, not from the practices of natural scientists but from what some philosophers of science have deemed those practices to be. More on this in a moment. We consider this dualism to be fundamentally misleading. As will be seen, one of the purposes of Roy Bhaskar's philosophy of the social sciences is to effect its transcendence through the subsumption of certain dimensions of positivism and hermeneutics to a transcendental realist framework incorporating a critical naturalism which necessarily involves also a critical hermeneutics (Bhaskar 1989a).

Before turning to Bhaskar's critical realism we need to elaborate on the points made in the previous paragraph. First, we have noted that the positivist understanding of natural science dictates a clean break from philosophy. This results in the preoccupation with methodology which marks all social sciences having positivist tendencies. For such sciences getting the method right is the key to scientific success. This is a matter of replicating the successful methods of the natural sciences which are deemed by positivists to be empiricist and universalist. Empiricism, or the claim that knowledge must be based *only* on experience – understood as the sense perceptions of suitably trained experts in the practices of experiment and observation – requires attentiveness exclusively to the factual and conceives of successful scientific practice in terms of empirical verification. Replication involves also a specific conception of objects of knowledge, namely that they be thought of as atoms (i.e., self-standing, independent, sufficient to themselves) and that they be regularly recurring phenomena appearing as constant conjunctions of events. Only through the accurate observation and recording of multiple instances of similar behaviours can the knowledge which we call science be attained

and verified.[8] Where used correctly, these empiricist universalist methods – involving observation and experimentation – will result in the production of well-grounded, indisputable knowledge having universal applicability that is, having a significance beyond the particularities of time and space.

So much for the object of knowledge. What of the knower? The positivist rubric is intended to establish a sharp distinction between subjective and objective and to ensure that scientists observe this distinction by practicing detachment or 'objectivity'.[9] Detachment has here the dual reference to the object of knowledge and to the scientist's own particular life situation. This two-dimensional detachment is intended to ensure the absolute separation of facts and values and the cleansing of the universal of all particularistic contamination. In other words, it assumes that subjects are, or can become, as atomised as their objects of knowledge are supposed to be.

Considered from a hermeneutic point of view, every claim or prescription put forward by positivists (in relation to the unity of method aspiration although not to the assumptions about the practices of natural scientists) can and must be challenged. Explanation signifies the search for causal accounts of the objects of sense perception – be they human or non-human – with a view to the making of predictions. Understanding, on the other hand, carries the assumption of a radical discontinuity between the non-human (the natural) and the human. This radical discontinuity is held to reside in the nature of the human world as a world of rules and meanings rather than of cause and effect; a world, therefore, not susceptible to the rubrics of predictability and universalisability which are the identifying marks of natural science (Winch 1958). From the hermeneutic point of view implied in the concept of understanding, neither predictability nor universalisability is a possible or desirable attribute of the human world: the former because humans have agency and intentionality and are not mere bearers of cause-effect relations; the latter because human societies are necessarily marked by historico-cultural differences.[10]

On the question of objectivity as conceptualised by positivism, that is, understood as 'the view from nowhere' (Nagel 1989), the hermeneutic insistence on the necessarily meaningful and historico-culturally specific nature of human life raises serious doubts about its feasibility, to say the least. From the hermeneutic point of view, the radical detachment apparently practiced by the natural scientist is just not possible for the social scientist who is necessarily 'situated' in relation to the social world and who, therefore, necessarily has a particular point of view. The social

scientist's view is always a view from 'somewhere' rather than 'nowhere'. (Roberts elaborates on the question of situatedness in his discussion of ethnography in Chapter 3.)

This point is related to the other major objection to the positivist programme, namely that, unlike the non-human world, the human world is an already conceptualised world; a world in which the objects of study are themselves conscious and reflexive, or, humans are not merely items in a predictable chain of causes and effects. Therefore, it is argued, social science is about understanding meaningful, historico-culturally specific social activity, not about explaining chains of cause and effect through the detached and passive observation of objective, universalisable behaviours or events. This is a viewpoint shared by critical realists and Marxists who do not, for this reason, reject the notion of laws of human life but, rather, insist upon their historical status (Bhaskar 1989a: 53; Marx 1976a: 101).[11]

Beyond the dualism? The critical realist position

As noted earlier, positivism and hermeneutics share a common understanding of natural science. Both deem the essence of science to be the unmediated encounter of a detached knowing subject and an object of knowledge conceptualised as atomised and marked by regular recurrence. Both share an objectivist, foundationalist and empiricist understanding of scientific knowledge as universally applicable, unassailable knowledge gained through the specific sense perceptions of scientists. The difference is that whereas positivism, accepting this, insists also on the unity of method, hermeneutics, because it accepts this, insists on the irrelevance of the natural science model to an understanding of human life. In summarising the two poles, Bhaskar writes 'For the positivist, science is outside society; for the hermeneuticist, society is outside science' (Bhaskar 1989a: 123). The original hermeneutic thinkers were keen to stress that their approach was not anti-science.[12] However, once positivism became the dominant, indeed the only, account of science many later hermeneutic theorists came to reject the very idea of a social science.[13] Against this, critical realism argues for a naturalism resting on a radical reconceptualisation of the natural sciences; one which would render the concept of social *science* meaningful without reducing human activity to the crude model of 'matter in motion' which positivism seems to require.[14] It is to this matter that we now turn.

Bhaskar's approach to overcoming the positivist-hermeneutic dualism, set out in *The Possibility of Naturalism* (1989a), takes off from his earlier philosophy of the experimental sciences (Bhaskar 1978). In the earlier

work, he begins with the transcendental question: given that science is possible, what does this tell us about the real world? What it tells us, according to Bhaskar, is that the world itself is structured, orderly and endures over time. It is for these reasons that it is open to scientific investigation. However, for Bhaskar scientific investigation is not, contrary to positivist claims, a matter of observing and recording regular experienceable recurrences, but the much more demanding task of getting at what generates these occurrences. What generates these occurrences, according to Bhaskar, is an irreducible level of being, beyond direct experience, consisting in structures and 'generative mechanisms' which do not necessarily produce predictable events or behaviours (Bhaskar 1989a: ch. 1). Rather, they have *tendencies* to produce specifiable effects. We may speak of these tendencies as laws so long as we adopt a tendential rather than determining conception of lawfulness. To produce scientific knowledge, then, is to produce knowledge of the functioning of tendential, rather than determining laws, or, knowledge of the reality which generates appearances. This is a crucial point in Bhaskar's philosophy of natural and social science.

The structured orderly nature of the world is in part reflected in the division of science into different disciplines, each dealing with a different aspect of reality. This is clearly the case with the natural world where disciplines like biology and physics deal with distinct strata – the physical level underlying the biological one. With the social world this stratification is more complex and is subject to historico-cultural variations. In the modern world, marked, as it is, by an advanced division of labour, distinct aspects of social reality can be identified – economic, cultural, political – which have a relatively enduring nature. It would be a mistake, however, to attempt to impose such institutional complexity on pre- or non-modern societies or to assume that this specific institutional complex is here to stay (Dean 2003).

For critical realists it is important to be clear about the relationship between different levels of reality – the physical, the biological, the social and the individual. The hierarchical nature of natural strata and the relationship between human and non-human strata need to be understood in terms of emergence if two extremes of reductionism are to be avoided: the materialist-physicalist reductionism of positivism and the idealist-mentalist reductionism of hermeneutics. In claiming that relationships between the physical and the biological, and between the biological and the social, are marked by emergence, critical realism is claiming that higher levels emerge out of the lower (Bhaskar 1989a: 97–101). The biological emerges out of the physical; the social emerges

out of the biological. In doing so, the higher level acquires powers not to be found at the lower level. This is in spite of the fact that it is composed solely of elements to be found at the lower level.[15] As Benton and Craib put it, the lower level explains only the constitution of the mechanisms at the higher level. It does not explain when or how those mechanisms will be exercised. Furthermore, these higher level effects can then act back upon and radically affect the lower level (Benton and Craib 2001: 126).

So far we have examined some key concepts which are part of a non-dualist philosophy of social science. These are (a) a tendential conception of causal law; (b) a claim about the stratified nature of reality and (c) a non-reductive account of the relations between different strata in terms of emergence. These concepts indicate the possibility of developing a social science marked by a non-positivist unity of method resting on a reconceptualisation of science. A crucial dimension of this reconceptualisation is the realist, non-deterministic understanding of lawfulness which Bhaskar develops. To pursue this matter further we now need to investigate stratification from another viewpoint: in terms of the distinction between the real, the actual and the empirical. We noted earlier that for Bhaskar lawfulness pertains to the level of the real – as a realm of causal powers, generative mechanisms or tendencies. The actual is the level of events which are generated by the real. It lies between the real and the empirical, the latter being what is experienced. Events may or may not be regularly recurring and they may or may not be experienced by us. What positivism does is to reduce science to knowledge of experienced events. It fails to notice what Bhaskar describes as the distinction between intransitive and transitive dimensions of scientific knowledge by collapsing the real into the actual and the actual into regularly recurring experienced events.

We have now come to another important critical realist distinction – between *intransitive* and *transitive* dimensions of reality – which is fundamental to Bhaskar's understanding of the world and of the nature of science. Having this distinction, we can understand the logic of experimental practice as a logic involving the attempt to identify a reality (the intransitive dimension) behind appearances (events and/or experience). The intransitive refers to 'real things and structures, mechanisms and processes, events and possibilities of the world; and for the most part they are quite independent of us' (Bhaskar 1978: 22). The scientific quest, as manifested in the experiment, is one of attempting to understand, not what regularly recurs, but what generates (or might be brought to generate) specific regular recurrences. The knowledge attained by science, as well as the instruments enabling the acquisition

of such knowledge, is described as *transitive*. Because there is a reality *behind* or *beneath* the actual and the empirical, positivism fails as an account of science. It fails in remaining at the surface of things; in failing to ask what generates the regularities with which it is concerned or, more strongly, in taking such regularities to be co-terminous with reality.

These two sets of distinctions developed by Bhaskar – between the real, the actual and the empirical, and between intransitive and transitive – enable the development of a critical naturalism which recognises a continuity between the natural and social sciences while also incorporating dimensions of the (implicit or explicit) philosophical anthropology which informs hermeneutics. The realm of the transitive is the realm in which human imagination and intentionality have as much free play as is compatible with the intransitive realm. Hence the concept of the transitive encompasses those specifically human dimensions which appear to be missed out by positivism. At the same time, the concept of intransitivity marks both the enablements and limitations placed upon the transitive. Note that intransitivity here connotes enablement/constraint rather than determination: it is internally related to the realist conception of lawfulness.

Thus the unity of method invoked by Bhaskar is one which rests on a reconceptualisation of science in line with a specific ontology which has the following characteristics. It involves a stratified reality which has the character of intransitivity that is, it exists independently of our perceptions and ideas and persists over time; an implicit philosophical anthropology which stresses active, imaginative, transformative human powers as the source of the transitive dimension; an anti-Humean understanding of causality in terms of tendencies rather than determination. For the unity of method to be possible, we must accept that there is a social intransitive which may not be (indeed is unlikely to be) wholly cognitively transparent. The goal of both natural and social scientists is to attain knowledge of the intransitive dimension. The difference between the non-human and human intransitive is that the latter is always already conceptualised and is, relatedly, historico culturally specific. Or, interpretation is present within the objects of knowledge with which social scientists are confronted. Another way of making this point is to say that social structures are ontologically distinct from natural structures in being activity, space, time and concept dependent. Both subjects and objects of social science are of a socio-historical nature. The significance of this is that, as Bhaskar points out, social science is a part of its own field of inquiry (Bhaskar 1989a: 47).[16]

The positivist tradition correctly stresses causal laws and generalities in social life but it reduces these to empirical regularities. The hermeneutic tradition rightly shows that social science deals with a pre-interpreted reality but it reduces social science to the modalities of a subject–subject relationship without recognising that the social may be inadequately conceptualised by social agents. Inadequate conceptualisation is a tendency, we might say, which inheres in the fact that there is more to the reality of social life than can be directly experienced by social agents (ibid.: 53). It is this 'more' that a critical realist social science seeks to bring into view.

Why is Realism important?

In contrast to the empiricist realism prescribed by positivism, Bhaskar's critical realism is a form of depth realism, a difference which is expressed in the important distinction between different levels of reality – the real, the actual and the empirical. As noted earlier, the concept of the real refers to an extra-experiential level of reality consisting in causal powers or generative mechanisms which may or may not be realised at the level of the actual (manifested in events). Events, in turn, may or may not be experienced or observed (registered at the level of the empirical). As we have seen, positivism reduces reality to the actual or, it is a form of 'actualism' which effectively denies the existence of the underlying structures and mechanisms that produce the events. It reduces reality to linear chains of cause and effect as manifested in event regularities. At its extreme, this point of view understands human activity on the model of 'matter in motion' and aims to produce knowledge taking the form of law-like statements (usually softened to probability statements) of the 'A causes B' variety. Critical realism shares with hermeneutics the view that this misguided endeavour serves to rob humanity of its specificity and dignity, or, of its unique causal powers for imaginative intentional free agency.

In setting out to refute and repudiate positivism, hermeneutics stresses the uniqueness of humans as symbol-using organisms carrying on a form of life which, unlike that of other animals or inanimate matter, requires interpretation rather than (sometimes as well as) explanation. Here, the claim – fully accepted by critical realism – is that the social world does not exist separately from the actions, ideas and understandings of the agents who populate it. However, critical realists have a more expansive or 'depth' account of how we go about understanding these actions and so on. That is to say, they insist on the need to go 'behind' these experiential dimensions of life (i.e., the transitive) so as to explain

what generates them (i.e., the intransitive). The intransitive cannot be reduced to the transitive; the real cannot be reduced to the actual or empirical. However, the transitive/actual is not determined, but enabled/constrained by the real.

At this point the spectre of the structure/agency problem makes its appearance. Bhaskar's critical realism attempts to transcend this dualism by means of the Transformational Model of Social Activity (TMSA). The purpose of the TMSA is to account for social structures and their relation to agents – social structure being an intransitive dimension of human life and therefore that which both constrains and enables everyday experience. Bhaskar rejects two different versions of a reductive account of the structure–agency relationship – Weberian voluntarism and Durkheimian determinism. The former reduces 'structure' to 'agency' by viewing it as the unintended consequence of individuals interacting whereas the latter reduces agency to structure by viewing it as determined by 'social facts' (Bhaskar 1989a: 31–44).[17] Also dismissed by Bhaskar, on the grounds that it merely combines the faults of the Weberian and Durkheimian models, is the 'dialectical' account advanced by Berger and Luckmann (Berger and Luckmann 1967). In place of these, Bhaskar's TMSA is deemed to be flawed by neither the 'voluntaristic idealism nor 'mechanistic determinism' (ibid.: 33) which the structure–agency debate has been incapable of transcending. Against versions of mechanistic determinism Bhaskar argues that structures do not exist independently of the activities they govern: that they are dependent on the intentional activities of agents for their reproduction. Against versions of voluntaristic idealism, he argues that the social world is not simply a set of intersubjective activities. The 'unintended consequences' of individuals' interactions are not some removable, accidental features of those interactions but are, rather, their structural prerequisite. Take the example of Christmas shopping: from a voluntarist idealist point of view, this activity is free, individual, intentional activity; from a mechanistic deterministic point of view it is determined by capitalist structures. Against these reductive positions, Bhaskar urges us to ask the question: 'what economic processes must take place for Christmas shopping to be possible?' (ibid.: 36). Implicit in this question is the further one: 'if we wanted to, how might we go about changing these?' In asking these questions we are transferring our attention from the everyday experiential to the real level of intransitive social powers which constitute the conditions of possibility of experience. In this case, the purpose of the transfer would be to provide the means for enhancing an everyday critical awareness of the broader and deeper implications of the everyday activity of Christmas shopping.

This modest but significant example of everyday activity and its underlying logic points us to the possible congruence between critical realism and Marxism. This matter is discussed in different ways in the chapters by Dean, Joseph and Roberts in this book. Although, as Roberts points out, Bhaskar's *A Realist Theory of Science* makes no mention of Marx, he has subsequently made clear that his interest in emancipation makes him in many respects a follower of Marx. In fact, it is arguable that Bhaskar seeks to clarify the philosophical dimensions of Marx's work so as to counter the many reductive interpretations to which it has been subjected (Bhaskar 1989b: ch. 7). In doing so, he is contributing to the development of a Marxism whose emancipatory impetus is unconstrained by technocratic tendencies.[18]

In order to criticise and subvert ideas and practices, however, it is necessary to *study* these within specific social contexts. Deciding what and how to study is a matter of deciding on what to abstract from the myriad relations, practices and processes which make up human life. This question of abstraction is a major concern of this book which is dealt with in the chapters by Roberts and Dean. Indeed, it is an important question for the whole of the social sciences and humanities even if on many occasions the method of abstraction is not discussed explicitly. Later in this introduction we will consider the differences between analytical and dialectical methods of abstraction. In the section that now follows we extend our introductory remarks concerning realist social theory by looking at the question of method and abstraction through two interrelated parts. First, we highlight a recent move within social theory to look at the performative moment of method. Second, we consider ethnography as an example of this performative method. The 'performative turn' is usually predicated upon the belief that old metaphors of depth, height, layers, and others – the sort of metaphors used by critical realism – are now hopelessly out of date. Our discussion of ethnography is intended as a refutation of this claim.

Realist method: on performance and ethnography

Some social theorists have begun to question the very metaphors used to think about the deep structures that affect our lived experience as researchers, and the lived experience of those we study.[19] As an interesting example, Law and Urry (2004) argue that the metaphors of height, depth, levels, size and proximity belong to a nineteenth-century project of social engineering associated with the concept of a new social entity called 'society'. 'Society' is here understood as that which is organised

through the nation-state with all this concept connotes in terms of territoriality, clear boundaries and so on (Law and Urry 2004: 398).

In such circumstances the metaphors contributed to the 'performance' of 'society' by giving the idea of 'society' practical depth. Specialists in studying 'society' were brought into being, along with instruments designed to study society such as those used to statistically measure populations.[20] Taken thus, Law and Urry suggest that social science methods are performative to the extent that they seek to produce the realities they are purporting to study. Or, in studying society social scientists are also contributing to the remaking of society. Law and Urry are quick to point out that the objects thus made cannot be deemed unreal or illusory. The 'discovery' of particular suicide rates will have real effects upon relevant individuals, groups and social contexts. They have been produced but nevertheless help to produce sets of material practices in both time and place. 'The move here is to say that *reality is a relational effect*. It is produced and stabilized in interaction that is simultaneously material and social' (ibid.: 195). Globalisation is a case in point. Through material-semiotic processes, such as global images, the global environment, global governmental organisations, global sporting and entertainment events, the global is performatively constructed as a kind of post-national socio-political unit which renders nation-state boundaries porous to the point of meaninglessness. In these 'new times', the argument goes, new social science metaphors are required to make sense of the world. The implication here is that the nature of shifting global networks is better captured by metaphors such as 'fluidity' and 'complexity' than by the old metaphors associated with 'society'.

Ethnography and the performative method

Let us consider this claim further, and indirectly, via a brief discussion of ethnography. In many respects ethnography can be seen as *the* performative methodology within the social sciences. This is because ethnography is concerned to understand the concrete, lived experience of subjects within a particular social context (Hammersley and Atkinson 1995). A basic assumption underpinning ethnographic research is that 'being there' is the *sine qua non* of valid ethnographic understanding. That is to say, that understanding of a specific social context requires the physical presence and active participation of the researcher in the social activity which constitutes the context in question. Once returned from the field, the research material must be rethought from a 'being here' perspective, or, the perspective of the researcher's own lived context. This is what is involved in the method of 'participant observation'.[21]

The method of participant observation rests on a belief in the authority of experience that is, of the experience of the ethnographer immersed in an 'exotic' or 'alien' way of life. As a discipline which had been implicated in the colonial encounter, ethnography was deeply affected by decolonisation in the 1950s (Clifford 1988). Out of this experience emerged a more self-critical approach to the ethnographer's practice; one involving attentiveness to the effects of the ethnographer's presence on the context under scrutiny. This attentiveness has been expanded in recent years to the post-research writing process of representing the context researched (Clifford and Marcus 1986; Geertz 1973, 1988). Conventions in writing or representing ethnography have thereby resulted in a critical analysis of the textual strategies applied through ethnographic writings and an exploration of how 'research fields' are textually constructed in the writing process (Atkinson 1992). In many respects this debate has its foundations in wider theoretical controversies over the extent to which a researcher can ever truly gain a 'thick description' (Geertz 1988) of a cultural and social context.

The new self-critical spirit to be found among ethnographers is to be welcomed. However, it is marked by what might be described as empiricist tendencies and weaknesses in that the critical moment concerns only the observable process of actual research. There is no attempt to ask questions about the significance of the pre-research constitution of the ethnographer's 'self'. In fact, this self-consciousness remains within the empirical dimension. In effect, it is a hermeneutic version of the actualism criticised by Bhaskar. The lack of a realist dimension results in the failure to make the self an object of scrutiny in any serious way. Beyond this, performative ethnography fails to take account of the fact that different temporal contexts have many non-observable characteristics, such as ideological mechanisms and social structures, which can have considerable effects and unintended consequences upon the research encounter.

But we should expect as much. For, and as other social theorists have argued, dilemmas arise daily in people's everyday lives, making the idea of a fixed, unified 'pre-research' self somewhat problematic. One way of understanding this is through the 'rhetorical approach' which underlines the importance of language in social interaction and asserts that social thinking occurs through argumentation and debate. From this viewpoint, cognitive psychology is mistaken when it seeks to investigate the fixed and consistent responses of individuals to attitudinal or belief systems by decontextualisng utterances and relating them to hypothesised internal structures. The static, unified responses anticipated by cognitive

psychologists exist only in their own minds. (Indeed, we might say that cognitive psychology is a very nice example of the performative scientific practice criticised by Law and Urry.) Contrary to what is assumed in such atomising, decontextualising experimental practices, in everyday situations people assess their social world and their interaction with others within that world by *engaging* with others and attempting to convince them of the reasonable nature of particular opinions. However, people soon discover that they are located in numerous 'rhetorical contexts' and, thus, discover that they are simultaneously located in numerous argumentative situations. Therefore different opposing views will have to be countered and, as such, the same speaker may observe that a recently opposed opinion will have to be defended if s/he wishes to fend off objections to a current standpoint. Moreover because utterances differ depending upon the rhetorical context within which one is engaged, everyday common sense must itself be 'dilemmatic' or conflictual. Common sense will comprise contrary themes so that each person will never confront the world with a stable and unified identity (Billig 1991, 1996).

Ethnography is concerned with the experiential dimension of reality and, regardless of the recent 'linguistic turn' among ethnographers, tends to remain hampered by an implicit empiricism as noted above. A truly self-critical ethnography would be one which understood the stratified nature of reality, therefore one which sought to explore the wider contexts within which the specific ethnographic moment of interaction takes place (Davies 1999). To expand a little, we believe that each social context assumes a specific ideological and contradictory form in the reproduction of wider social relations at different levels of abstraction. Given this belief, it becomes important to ask questions about the constitution, maintenance, distribution and control of meaning at various levels of abstraction. In getting answers to these questions we are developing our understanding of the structural conditions of possibility of our own research practices, as well as of our everyday objects of research (Scholte 1986: 10–11). This entails engagement in personal reflexivity regarding our own particular situatedness and in theoretical reflexivity about the concepts we use and are developing in order to make sense of the structured and overdetermined nature of a particular social context (Cain 1990). According to Davies, this type of reflexivity is advantageous because it 'provides a philosophical basis for ethnographic research to provide explanatory (law-like) abstractions while also emphasizing its rootedness in the concrete, in what real people on the ground are doing and saying' (Davies 1999: 20). Recall the example of Christmas shopping

cited earlier. In taking this ordinary (capitalist) everyday activity as an object of knowledge we need to ask questions about the economic processes which constitute its conditions of possibility, as noted. However, we also need the ethnographic activity directed at the experiences and motivations of shoppers. The reflections of ethnographers can aid us in developing sound interpretive or hermeneutic methods. As realists, though, we would want to insist on the need to bring structures into focus so as to simultaneously ground ethnography 'in a practical politics dedicated to changing … (those) troubles' that such structures inflict upon the lives we study and begin to think about 'transforming the conditions of inequality, exploitation and oppression' to which they give rise and which they serve to reproduce (Hutnyk 2004: 34).

Thus when one talks of the 'real', even if this is mediated through notions of 'performance', it remains necessary to invoke the old metaphors of 'depth', 'height', and so on. These metaphors remain important as indicators of the gap between reality and our experience of reality, and of the potential inhering in this gap for misconceptions of reality to emerge and become part of everyday life. Foremost among these misconceptions is the reduction of reality to our experience of it. To return to the recent argument of Law and Urry, a realist position grounded in dialectics (more on this below) can quite happily accept that the world is 'fluid' and 'complex' rather than fixed and simple. However, this acceptance does not involve the rejection of concepts relating to the ontological, theoretical and political significance of extra-experiential dimensions of reality; of depth ontology, reality and appearance, and so on. Such concepts are crucial for investigating the world (Byrne 2002: 9).

Regarding the claim that there is no longer a 'central governor' determining or co-ordinating the system as a whole (Law and Urry 2004: 401), adopting a dialectical realist standpoint we can see no reason not to identify such a 'central governor', given that in recent years the world has ever more been made in the image of capital (Arrighi 2005). To deny the power of capitalism as a 'central governor' is to explore the world only through its appearances (the levels of the actual and the empirical) without considering how these levels are generated.[22] In any case, if we accept that the age of grand social engineering projects is not in the past, we must also accept the continuing relevance of established social theories. While we have focused mainly upon the benefits of pursuing a critical realist approach, we now look at method associated with Marx and with Marxism. For we also believe that the work of Marx, and Marxism more generally, provide essential guidance as to how a realist

social theory that calls itself critical might go about exploring the social world, particularly as presently constituted by a globalising capitalism.[23]

Thus the next section will explore the relationship between philosophy and the social sciences from a Marxian point of view, the purpose being to consider what critical realism might gain through the appropriation of certain Marxian elements. A discussion of the philosophical dimensions of Marx's thought will enable a further exploration of the following topics: of human ontology as an historical ontology of potentials seeking actualisation; of – given the nature of human potentials – the wrong-headedness of the ideal–material (understanding/explanation) dichotomy; of a specific manifestation of human potential that is, industrial capitalism and of the theory (that of classical political economy) which contributed to the emergence and flourishing of industrial capitalism; of what that particular theory/practice relationship can tell us about the relationship between knowledge and emancipation today. On method, attention will be paid to the practice of abstraction and to the need to correct bad abstractions through the use of Marxian dialectics.

Marx on philosophy and method

It is important to recall the congruence of purpose – the promotion of human emancipation – in the philosophy of Bhaskar and Marxian social science. Marx's method of inquiry was developed to explore the nature of industrial capitalism as it emerged in England during the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. His project was a critical one of revealing the total cultural novelty of capitalism in terms of the kinds of social relations which it produced and required for its functioning. This revelation was intended to encourage the constitution of a collective actor with the power to replace capitalism by a superior form of life in which the human potential for freedom, praxis and sociality would be realised to its fullest and most diverse extent. Marx's stress on the need for collective action to effect human emancipation is a useful corrective to the metaphysical extravagances of Bhaskar's recent work. His more earth-bound understanding of the dialectic can help fill the gaps and correct the misleadingly universalising dimensions of Bhaskar's dialectic (Collier 1998a). (Joseph provides a comprehensive discussion of Bhaskar's dialectic in Chapter 4.) Marx's attempt to understand the relationship between philosophy and social science can help us to think further about the purposes of philosophy as underlabourer of the sciences (Balibar 1995).

As noted earlier, social scientists lack the self-confidence of their natural scientific equivalents and are constantly seeking legitimation for their

scientific status in philosophy. Insofar as this dependence signifies a self-consciousness and openness to revision of practices in line with the findings of philosophy, this may be a good thing. If we take the concern of philosophy to be the nature of being, rather than the technical activity of conceptual maintenance allocated to it by the logical positivists, and if we accept that the nature of the social world changes, then the social sciences will and should remain dependent on philosophy (Rabinow 1996: ch. 3). At the same time, a philosophy which is inattentive to, or which dismisses the consequentiality of, the empirical world in which the social scientists are working will become irrelevant, as has Bhaskar's recent work in our view.

Philosophies of social science, whether explicitly or implicitly, rest on a philosophical anthropology. They are informed by assumptions or rest on explicit claims about the nature of the human being. In the course of arriving at his TMSA, Bhaskar examines (all too briefly, unfortunately) these assumptions/claims insofar as they inform 'models' of the society/agency relationship, as noted above. The TMSA is intended to correct the voluntarism of the Weberian model by stressing the ineradicability of structures (which are conceptualised as enabling as well as constraining) and to correct the determinism of the Durkheimian model by positing an ontological gap between structure and agency. The main point is that agents are capable of intentional, consequential action. They are reflexive; they act for reasons rather than in stimulus-response mode.

We have here the beginnings of a philosophical anthropology which rests on Bhaskar's earlier account of the structured nature of reality (Bhaskar 1978) – physical, biological, social, psychological – and on the emergent character of the higher strata which depend upon, but cannot be reduced to, the lower. To repeat the point made earlier: by emergent character is meant that entities at higher levels are the result of the fusion of entities at the lower level and possess, through this fusion, powers not possessed by their constituent components. Humans are composed of physical, biological, social and psychological dimensions. While it may sometimes be appropriate to consider them from the physical or biological point of view, to attempt to reduce them to the physical or biological would be a fundamental mistake in that it would eliminate from view the constitutive character of the intentional, meaningful, reasoning dimension of human activity. Similarly, to reduce them to their 'mental' or ideational dimensions would be similarly misleading. (The topic of philosophical anthropology is discussed further by Dean in Chapter 5.)

Having recapitulated the relevant points of Bhaskar's philosophy, what we now want to do is to explore the complementary aspects of the

philosophical dimensions of Marx's social science. In what follows we will be referring to Marx's method. However, in doing so we need to be aware that Marx himself had very little to say about this, hence the scope for a diversity of views on what, precisely, his method consists in.[24] Here we want to take from Marx a non-deterministic realist philosophy and method.[25] (The work of contemporary Marxists on method is explored by Roberts in Chapter 3.)

Marx's work predates the emergence of the explanation/understanding distinction, although, if we accept that this can be mapped onto the material/ideal distinction we can know what his view of this would be, namely that the opposing pairs are abstractions from a unity (Marx 1976b). Positivism and hermeneutics are informed by a mechanistic materialist and a voluntarist idealist understanding of human beings respectively. To transcend the dichotomy is to attend at once to the passive (material) and the active (ideal) dimensions of human life, or to incorporate what Bhaskar describes as the intransitive dimension into our social sciences without succumbing to determinism.

The philosophical dimensions in Marx's work consist in claims about the necessary historicity and relationality of human being (Kosik 1976).[26] Given this necessary historicity, method is also, necessarily, historical and specific to its object (Marx 1976a: 101). There is no master key in the shape of a 'supra-historical', 'historical–philosophical theory' which will yield us understanding of all human phenomena. This is because, being *human* phenomena, these are also *historical* phenomena. So both objects of knowledge and knowledge of objects will be, of necessity, historical.

From a Marxian point of view historicity saturates not only objects of knowledge and methods of studying them but also human nature itself. Historicity is here an expression of the active, imaginative dimension of human nature, or, to express it in Marxian terms, of the fact that human beings must *make*, rather than merely *find*, their means of subsistence. In making and remaking their means of subsistence, humans also make and remake themselves. Making or 'production' is what Marx describes as 'sensuous activity', or, activity involving both material (passive) and ideal (active) dimensions. The separation of the material from the ideal is an historically specific development related to the mental–manual division of labour, as explored by Marx and Engels in *The German Ideology* (Marx and Engels 1976). Undoing this separation is an important dimension of Marx's work, as set out in unfortunately cryptic terms in the 'Theses on Feuerbach (1976b).[27] The object of study then becomes, not making or production conflated with the 'matter in

motion' of mechanical materialists, but rather the 'sensuous activity' of concretely existing individuals engaged in social relations and practices which are necessarily but not only material, because as *human* activity, they are also necessarily meaningful. That is to say, they must be interpreted as well as explained.

Marx's primary object of study – undertaken with critical-emancipatory intent – is the 'bourgeois' mode of production. At this point it will be useful to examine the theory/practice relationship as conceptualised by Marx. This is a preliminary to the more detailed examination of the knowledge/emancipation question explored by Wight in Chapter 2.

We can explore this matter further via a discussion of Marx's conception of praxis. As Gouldner notes (Gouldner 1980) the concept of praxis is used in two different senses in Marx's work: one connoting the habitual practices which are reproduced more or less automatically; the other connoting the kind of strongly, self-consciously intentional action with which Bhaskar is primarily concerned. Here we are concerned with praxis in the latter sense while noting that much, even most, of human activity is habitual or taken-for-granted. (See Joseph's critique of the idealising tendencies of the 'praxis Marxism' of Lukács – among others – in Chapter 4.)

The concept is in any case, and however used, an expression of Marx's conviction that reality as sensuous human activity is always, in however minimal a sense, meaningful or conceptual, as noted earlier. It is an activity which may, but does not necessarily, produce out of itself thought which is active, that is, which is oriented in an active way to the world of which it is in some sense the expression. We are concerned here with the praxis of theorising as activity intended to promote a critical awareness of the everyday world. In exploring this kind of activity, as manifested in the theorising of the classical political economists, Marx wants to stress its importance in informing transformative action. He wants us to attend to the ways in which, once gained, knowledge can be used to transform the world. In fact, there is a dialectical relationship between thought and reality. This is because humans are capable of forming purposes in relation to a pre-existing reality. We are capable of becoming actively conscious, not only of that reality, but of our own relationship to that reality. Self-consciousness is expressed most systematically in philosophy. However, philosophy merely interprets the world. Unlike science, it confines itself to the level of contemplation. This is, for Marx, a failure that needs correcting. The role of science is to provide the kind of knowledge which will render new kinds of praxis possible; to change the world rather than merely to interpret it.

It should be noted though that, for Marx, the advent of science heralds not the elimination but rather the transcendence of philosophy. Transcendence is here used in the Hegelian dialectical sense to refer to a process of simultaneous negation and preservation. Marxian scientific concepts are also always philosophical or, put another way, science renders philosophy active rather than contemplative (Kosik 1976).[28]

It follows from what has been said that for Marx, as for Bhaskar, the development of knowledge is closely connected to real social movement. Movement or development within the world is necessarily bound up with human action in and on the world and is therefore always in some sense categorial or conceptual development. To talk of human action *in* the world (practice) is to emphasise reproduction; to talk of action *on* the world is to emphasise transformation.[29] Classical political economy is the theoretical expression of an emergent set of social relations, practices and processes (composing capitalist industrialisation) which would come to transform the world. If one wants to gain cognitive purchase on these processes, then classical political economy is the place to begin (Kain 1986: 19).

In brief, political economy is both caused and causal. It is a reflection, from a specific point of view (that of the 'industrious' classes) on emergent processes in an existing reality, a reflection which first identifies and thereafter renders more systematic categories of persons, activities and processes in that reality. Historically, this particular theoretical rendering of an emergent state of affairs became the basis (necessary but not sufficient) for facilitating specific developments by eliminating or discouraging activities and processes which would have prevented their flourishing. So political economy is knowledge which has served in the transformation, rather than merely reproduction, of an existing state of affairs. It is knowledge as praxis which, given appropriate political activity, can inform a project of collective action oriented to the transformation of the world in line with this knowledge. But it could only fulfil this function because it constituted scientific knowledge.[30]

So, for example, political economists such as Adam Smith and David Ricardo produced scientific knowledge – knowledge of the reality which produced 'appearances' – of late eighteenth and early nineteenth century English capitalism. They began the important work of class analysis and of identifying the true source of value. Political economy expresses certain aspects of capitalism quite satisfactorily through the concepts of value, money, capital, labour and the commodity. These concepts are grounded in concrete developments in the England of the Industrial Revolution which is, as Marx notes, the *locus classicus* of 'the relations of

production and forms of intercourse' corresponding to the capitalist mode of production Marx (1976a: 90). However, the categories of political economy are marked by a kind of structural flaw or fundamental category error in that they consistently naturalise the historically specific social relations of capitalism. They do this by conflating transhistorical abstractions – labour, raw materials, tools – and historical abstractions – commodities, money, capital.

Social theory and the problem of abstraction

The problem of abstraction was discussed above using the example of ethnography. As we noted, ethnography tends towards an empiricist bias by abstracting the experiential from its structural conditions of possibility (the real) and treating it as self-sufficient. This bias is not corrected in any serious way by the recent ethnographic 'linguistic' turn. At this point we consider the matter of abstraction at a higher level than is appropriate for ethnographic work, the purpose being to explore the problems of reification and naturalisation. On this matter the distinction between transhistorical and historical abstractions will prove crucial. In examining abstractions we are appropriating a dimension of Marx's method about which we can be certain: namely his use of existing bodies of theory as a starting point for his own work. Or, the use of this method involves the critical use of existing theoretical abstractions which express something significant about everyday life. For example, and most importantly, the economic categories developed by Smith and Ricardo offer Marx a means of approaching the bewildering complexity of the concrete world in a systematic manner.[31] Through a deconstruction of these categories (i.e., a revelation of their historical and class specificity and of the consequences of the failure on the part of theorists to notice this) Marx expects to move on to a fuller, more scientific account of capitalism. In doing so he will practice a method of abstraction which, unlike the atomising abstraction practiced by positivists, will not violate the real nature – historical, relational – of his objects of knowledge.

The abstraction of entities from a complex reality and the separation in thought of what is inseparable in reality is necessary for the practice of social science. Where the social scientist goes wrong is in reifying the thought separation by confusing the analytic category with the social entity, or, by ontologising the abstration. Where abstractions are ontologised the necessary historical, relational character of human life is concealed from view (Ollman 1976, 2003).

The analytic method which is adopted by political economy, as well as by most of the social sciences, involves the following steps: the abstraction

of entities from a complex reality, that is, the separation in thought of what is inseparable in reality; the reification of that separation through the conflation of analytic category and social entity. The result is that the world is seen as an assemblage of clearly bounded objective entities which exist independently of each other. One of two approaches is then used to explain the relationship between these apparently free-standing entities and to solve the problem of the relationship and causal weight of apparently opposing phenomena (e.g., structure/agency, determinism/voluntarism, society/individual, material/ideal) which the process of abstraction establishes. The first approach is dualism, which claims the total distinctiveness and separateness of these entities and so the impossibility of explaining one in terms of the other. The second is reductionism, which reduces one to the other. Neither of these approaches is satisfactory because both of them do cognitive violence to cultures as they really function. The TMSA, later elaborated dialectically as the 'social cube' (Bhaskar 1993: 160) is the model whereby Bhaskar attempts to avoid reductionism. (For more on Bhaskar's '4-planar model of social being' see Joseph's discussion in Chapter 4.) Marx's dialectical method of dealing with the problem will be worth a brief exploration here. Crucial to this method is the practice of dialectical rather than analytical abstractions. Dialectical abstractions are abstractions which do not obliterate the historical relational nature of human life; analytical abstractions are abstractions which do just this.[32]

Bhaskar, Marx and the dialectic

At this point it will be useful to say something about Bhaskar's dialectic (Bhaskar 1993), since the point of exploring that of Marx is to suggest how it might correct some of the deficiencies of Bhaskar's account. Bhaskar's dialectic is pitched at the level of transhistorical abstractions and consists in the construction of an inventory of various dialectical 'nut-pieces', as Andrew Collier puts it (Collier 1998a: 689). For Bhaskar himself, the major theoretical advance in *Dialectic* is the concept of 'ontological polyvalence' which is internally related to that of 'absence'. From having been concerned with an ontology of real powers – an ontology of presence – in his pre-dialectical work, Bhaskar now wants to stress the primacy of absence and conceptualises human activity in terms of the absenting of absences. Regarding the latter, the master–slave relationship becomes the form in which all kinds of human oppression are understood and human transformative intentionality is conceptualised as the desire to absent the absence of freedom experienced through these master–slave relations. Here, as discussed by

Joseph in Chapter 4, Bhaskar is taking the dialectic to a level of 'transcendental universals' which renders impossible the identification of those social structures which need to be transformed and of the 'master–slave' struggles capable of effecting transformation.

Unlike that of Bhaskar, the Marxian dialectic is clearly engaged with the historico-cultural and is developed in response to and as a correction of the analytical (mis)interpretations of the classical political economists. Indeed, the task of Marxian dialectics is to translate the 'things' and 'facts' produced by political economy back into processes carried by social relations (Shamsavari 1991: ch. 3). Such a translation will provide a full account of the 'concrete reality' – the unity of many determinations – of industrial capitalism while at the same time revealing, first, the way in which that reality has transformed social relations and, second, the likelihood or otherwise that somehow out of this concrete reality will emerge social relations having the powers to generate emancipatory practices.

This is the materialist dialectical method, as opposed to the idealist dialectic of Hegel. Hegel's dialectical logic is an a priori method based on logical analysis. It exists at the conceptual rather than the practical empirical level. For Hegel, the latter is composed of abstract, or disconnected entities whose connections are achieved only in thought. Because Hegel had made the dialectical nature of thought the basis of concrete reality, that is, he saw the actually existing social world as a manifestation of the Concept, he failed to achieve his goal of transcending the thought/being (or ideal/material) dichotomy. Marx does this by stressing the necessary material or embodied character of conceptual thought as well as the necessarily conceptual character of everyday activity, as mentioned earlier. Although he himself refers to the need to invert the Hegelian dialectic, the notion of inversion is, as Althusser claims, unsatisfactory since it leaves the dialectic fundamentally unchanged (Althusser 1990).[33] This notion is not compatible with either the extremely subtle analysis which Marx himself carries out in *Capital 1* or with his own most powerful insights (as captured most compellingly and succinctly in the 'Theses on Feuerbach') about the inadequacy of both materialism and idealism.[34] In any case, the logic of the dialectic is a logic the rigorous use of which requires the transcendence of all such dichotomies. Marx's use of the dialectical method is not accurately captured by either the 'inversion' or 'kernel' metaphors. Rather than turning Hegel's dialectic upside down Marx is transforming it so as to effect the transcendence of the ideal/material dichotomy. In effecting this transcendence, he is at the same time rendering the method capable of capturing the character of the

capitalist totality in a way which recognises the causal weight of the material as always necessarily conceptual.

The dialectical method was used by Marx to explore the nature of a specific mode of production – industrial capitalism – as it emerged in England during the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. It is a method which is internally related to the character of that object and which remains useful so long as that object remains substantially unchanged. While Marx himself considered the dialectic to be a universal property of the human world, he also noted the peculiarly dialectical character of capitalism whose movement, as he said, 'is full of contradictions' (Marx 1976a: 103). Here the concept of contradiction has a clear empirical referent in that it refers to the 'pulling apart' of practices that are necessarily (functionally) related so that each practice becomes 'indifferent' to the needs of the other. The clearest example offered by Marx is that of the 'relatively autonomous' development of the spheres of production and exchange which renders capitalism crisis prone. Contradiction is here used in an empirical rather than metaphysical sense to capture the character of relations between necessary elements of industrial capitalist modes of production which are marked by a kind of fragmentation (spatio-temporal separation) which allows the relatively independent development of these necessary elements.

The practice of analytical abstraction appears sensible because capitalist processes really do separate out or fragment groups, individuals and activities in a radically new way. We could say that this approach captures, up to a point, the appearance but not the reality of the capitalist way of life. However, these separated entities continue to have necessary relations with one another and it is to this simultaneous empirical separation, experienced as apparent independence, and real interdependence that the concept of contradiction refers, as we have seen. This is part of the new conceptual language needed to capture a reality rendered opaque through the spatio-temporal and other fragmentations which characterise capitalism. Dialectics captures the reality of the modern (post-sixteenth century) world insofar as this has been constituted by liberal capitalist industrialisation. The dialectic is therefore simultaneously epistemological, ontological-relational and empirical (Bhaskar 1989b: ch. 7). It is an attempt to provide an account of a social realm which is the product of capitalist practices and processes which have *at the same time* totalising and fragmenting effects; to do so, moreover, in a way which stresses capitalism's necessary historicity and the transformative potential of human activity.

In summary, the philosophical dimensions of Marx's work provide an account of ontology which stresses the relational-historical character of

human life and the potential for theoretically informed transformative action inhering in humans. This is an ontology which requires the dissolution of the dichotomies – such as ideal/material and voluntarism/determinism – through an understanding of the bad practices of analytical abstraction of which these dichotomies are the result. On this matter, Marx's work – where read as a non-reductive historical, rather than mechanical, materialism – is compatible with and can help us to elaborate on, Bhaskar's analysis. Beyond this, the distinction between transhistorical and historical abstractions which we can extract from Marx's work enables us to correct the formalism of Bhaskar's dialectical categories as does Marx's concept of contradiction. The latter enables an elaboration and correction of Bhaskar's all-embracing concept of absence in a way which enables us to identify more or less consequential absences as manifested in the functional failures which result from the spatio-temporal separation of necessary practices and processes.

In bringing out the historical-dialectical nature of the development of human capabilities, a Marxian philosophical anthropology enables us to address a matter which is neglected by Bhaskar, namely the actualisation of human potentials. (Dean elaborates on this matter in Chapter 5.) In his historicising critique of classical political economy, Marx draws our attention to the dangers of conflating the transhistorical and the historical; a danger not always avoided by Bhaskar, particularly and paradoxically in his dialectics. In that same critique, however, he shows us also the dialectical relationship between critical science and transformation– emancipation. The classical political economists had an 'addressee' for their theory, namely, the 'industrious classes' and, moreover, set out to actualise their theories through participation in the consequential political practices of their day. Marx sought to follow their example in this respect. The fact that Marx's addressee failed to attend to the message and that his theory was applied under circumstances for which it was not developed has caused many to question the relevance of Marx's work today.[35] This is not our position. Rather, we believe that so long as capitalism remains in place Marx's theory will remain a rich resource for those of us who are seeking to critique and promote an emancipatory politics.

Where has critical realism gone wrong?

This book is a critical engagement with critical realism that establishes what is important in this tradition but is also highly critical of recent turns in Bhaskar's work. None of us would say that we are critical realists first and foremost. Rather, our openness to critical realist ideas comes

from its usefulness alongside other theories that help us to understand the social world. In particular, we are more open to the arguments of the earlier works of critical realism and are concerned to establish the positive and negative consequences of Bhaskar's later dialectical and spiritual 'turns'. These later turns, we believe, demonstrate the dangers of a philosophy which has cut itself off from the social sciences. However, the task is, not to eliminate philosophy, but to ensure that it remains grounded in the social sciences, particularly in Marxism.

As Bhaskar's own philosophical claims have become ever more speculative and divorced from a social ontology, most critical realists are ignoring this work and turning to a more empirically grounded, methodological form of critical realism. We are concerned that both these approaches represent a form of conflation. With Bhaskar's approach speculative philosophy has enveloped social science. The reaction to this has been for a methodological form of critical realism to apply itself directly to the social world thereby risking the methodological error of actualism. The avoidance of these opposing errors – of an empirically 'pure' universalising form of philosophising and of a research method which risks empiricism or actualism – can be ensured by realising the importance of an intervening level of social theory between philosophy and social research. (For more on this see Joseph's discussion in Chapter 4.) It is necessary to maintain constant traffic between these different levels if we are not to revert to the errors of idealist philosophy or empiricism.

Summary of chapters

Wight's overarching concern in Chapter 2 is the relationship between science and emancipation. Noting the effects of positivism's pursuit of a value-free science in terms of the reduction of ethics to emotivism, or individual preference, Wight draws on Alasdair MacIntyre's argument in *After Virtue* to support the attempt to recover the sense of telos – of an objective purposefulness inhering in the (human) nature of things – lost through this development. MacIntyre's invocation of Aristotelian philosophy reminds us that, for the ancient Greeks, the human world embodied an objective rationality which dictated that, as speaking organisms, human beings have a uniquely human destiny, namely, to attain eudaimonia. In a post-Enlightenment world in which rationality has been subjectivised or internalised, we have lost this conviction and, from Wight's point of view, are all the poorer for it. Much of the chapter consists in a discussion of Roy Bhaskar's spiritual turn which, as Wight

acknowledges, is a serious attempt to re-establish an objective ethics. In the process of doing so, however, Bhaskar has left little or no place for science and urges on us a kind of super-natural and super-social account of human well-being. Indeed he opened *From East to West* with the claim that 'man is essentially god'. In a series of subsequent books this theme has been developed, defended and explained with a new universe of meta-reality opening up and revealing itself to be the true ground of emancipation. Meta-reality, however, is not accessible via, or susceptible to, scientific analysis. Therefore, science can no longer help in achieving emancipation. Wight argues that following Bhaskar into the realm of the meta-real in search of emancipation would require that critical realists give up on science. Against this, Wight proposes the enhancement of Bhaskar's pre-dialectical and underdeveloped work on the TMSA via Bourdieu's concept of the habitus. This would provide the ontological argument needed to ground an emancipatory project.

In Chapter 3 Roberts takes up the theme of Marxism and its possible relationship with critical realism, and stresses the mutually beneficial potential in such a relationship. Noting critical realism's early concern to work as underlabourer for Marxism by, for example, pointing out problems and inconsistencies with Marxist theory, Roberts traces the later move away from Marxism motivated by the attempt to construct a macro critical realist social theory. It is arguable that at this point critical realist ambitions changed from providing underlabouring functions for Marxism to developing its own self-enclosed social theory capable of rivalling others in the field, including Marxism. With this attempted development came the tendency to see method as a meta-theoretical device that could be imposed upon the world in order to understand aspects of it. In other words, method was separated from the historically specific boundaries of social systems. At the same time, many others moved away from this transcendental standpoint and attempted to construct the methodological insights of critical realism at a meso-level theory of abstraction. Yet while these authors attempted to overcome some of the more generalised accounts of method as found in macro forms of critical realism, method remains problematic in these accounts because it remains abstracted from reality, albeit at a meso-level. This chapter critically charts these changing methodological critical realist positions from the viewpoint of a Marxist-inspired strand of critical realism. By drawing upon, and developing, the Marxist accounts of method in which this strand consists, the chapter explores the potential for a fusion of critical realism and Marxism on this crucial question of method. This fusion should solve the main problem to be found in critical realist

research methods, namely their de-historicising tendency as expressed in a retroductive methodology which nurtures non-contradictory, linear depictions of social relations. Roberts' specific contribution to the promotion of a critical realist-Marxist fusion is to argue for the addition of a specific historical level to the three espoused by critical realism. This leaves us with historical, real, actual and empirical levels, the historical being deemed by Roberts to be a determining realm behind or beneath the real. Failure to inject historicity into the foundations of critical realism in this way, will, argues Roberts, result in failure to provide a radical critique of society.

The topics of emancipation and of critical realism's relationship with Marxism are taken up again by Joseph in Chapter 4. Here the main focus is on Bhaskar's work on the dialectic of freedom and emancipation. Dating the deterioration in critical realism's relationship to Marxism to the publication of Bhaskar's *Dialectic*, Joseph traces the conceptual changes which had, in his view, begun to drain critical realism of its scientific, critical power. From having shown, via the TMSA, the dependence of structural reproduction on human activity, and therefore, the possibility of social transformation, Bhaskar appears to forget the specific ontological insights associated with the develoment of the TMSA; insights relating to the reality of structures and generative mechanisms, of stratification, causal powers and emergent properties. In giving primacy to negativity and non-being in *Dialectic*, Joseph argues, Bhaskar strays too far from a structurally grounded theory of human behaviour, invoking instead humanist and hermeneutic notions such as intersubjective rationality, a dialogical conception of human practice and a transcendentally universal notion of emancipation. Emphasis on agency, praxis and liberation should be welcomed. But the way this is formulated will not stand up to the kind of rigorous social scientific analysis demanded in the earlier work.

Finally, in Chapter 5 Dean provides another viewpoint on the critical realist-Marxist relationship by advocating an Althusserian critical realist 'turn'. Once again there is a focus on the topic of human agency and emancipation which is here given a strong dialectical interpretation. Echoing Roberts' charge that critical realism tends to neglect historicity, Dean deems this tendency to have been present in Bhaskar's work from *The Possibility of Naturalism* onwards. This tendency is manifested in the naturalisation of human agency as individual intentional and consequential action. It is a tendency which encourages neglect of the task of developing a philosophical anthropology in which a critical realist theory of emancipation can be grounded. The result is an a- or even anti-political

account of human freedom. As a means of correcting this aspect of Bhaskar's work, Dean – in this following Bhaskar himself and elaborating on some of Wight's remarks in Chapter 2 – conceptualises freedom as eudaimonia and returns to Aristotle's writings as a source of enlightenment on what might be involved in the attainment of this condition. What is abstracted from Aristotle is an ontology of potentiality which stresses the human need for cultural constitution. Following this, Bhaskar's philosophy of the experimental physical sciences and Althusser's work on the materialist dialectic and on ideology are used as sources for expanding our understanding of this ontology of potentiality. The purpose is to develop the critical philosophical anthropology needed to ground critical realism's advocacy of eudaimonia as a possible and worthwhile human goal.

2
Realism, Science and Emancipation

Colin Wight

Is there any link between knowledge and emancipation? Despite the supposed victories of Enlightenment thought, since Hume, and under the weight of a positivist orthodoxy, the answer for we 'moderns' has been 'no'; facts and values are distinct realms and one cannot inform the other. For many of the theories falling under the label of 'critical social science', however, the answer is a resounding 'yes', even if the precise nature of the link is assumed rather than explicitly theorised.[1] In many respects these two competing answers to the question of the relationship between knowledge and emancipation represent two modes of thought that infect and fracture all intellectual traditions. The relationship between them is complex and the complete story of their development and interaction is beyond the scope of this chapter. At the risk of gross and indecent simplification, however, one could say that they stand in a symbiotic relationship. One feeds off the other in what might be described as a dialectical process; albeit an antagonistic one. Dialectical processes, however, at least as commonly understood, always involve a moment of *aufhebung*. Two dialectical protagonists, that is, necessarily lead to the production of a third position that incorporates the truth of both. As the process unfolds, neither of the protagonists remains the same, but equally, the truth of neither is destroyed. The emerging third term bears the mark of the two alternatives, but is distinct from them. This raises the interesting question of whether these two modes of thought have produced a dialectically derived third response to the knowledge-emancipation conundrum.

In this chapter, I want to explore the relationship between knowledge and emancipation in the hope of locating an account of the relationship that neither falls to the naivety of Voltaire, nor succumbs to the negativity of Nietzsche.[2] My focus is on a particular form of knowledge;

namely scientific knowledge. Scientific knowledge, I argue, is knowledge that produces depth explanations of phenomena. There are, of course, other kinds of knowledge. Knowledge of how to conduct oneself in social situations, for example, or how to take the right course of action, and I do not wish to suggest that science is the most important, or the only kind of knowledge. However, scientific knowledge is distinguishable from other kinds of knowledge in that it produces explanations of processes, events and phenomena by identifying factors and relationships that are not immediately apparent. In this sense, science goes beyond appearances, and it is this aspect of social science that makes it indispensable in terms of emancipation. A commitment to depth realism presupposes that there are things, entities, structures and/or mechanisms that operate and exist independently of our ability to know or manipulate them. It also presupposes, that appearances do not exhaust reality, that there are things going on, as it were, beyond and behind the appearances that are not immediately accessible to our senses. Emancipation, I shall argue, requires explanations that go beyond those given in agents' own accounts of what they are doing.

Critical realism explicitly sets out to chart this terrain and attempts to develop a position that does not rely on a formalistic and fixed 'methodology' of science, whilst at the same time avoiding a dangerous regression into relativism. This can only be achieved, however, through a philosophical defence of the position I wish to advocate. There is simply no way to move directly from a commitment to the broad framework of critical realism (as philosophy) to substantive methodological development. The need to engage in in-depth philosophical groundwork can frustrate practicing social scientists, who, whilst accepting the general principles of the critical realist schema, are keen to employ it in substantive research without getting bogged down in complex philosophical speculation.[3] Yet, the fact that critical realism places ontology at the heart of analysis means that there can be no specification of methods in an ontological vacuum. The content and form of any science will depend upon the object under consideration. Differing object domains will require differing methodologies. Critical realism as a philosophy of, and for, the sciences cannot be directly 'plugged' into social research and the attempt to develop methodologies without paying due attention to philosophical themes is apt to reproduce empiricist forms of research practice. The role of philosophy in the research process is both varied and vital. All research begins with philosophical assumptions, even if these are not explicitly articulated. Critical realism as philosophy attempts to make visible the philosophical assumptions that underpin

all research, whilst at the same time developing its own unique approach.

I concentrate my attention on one small, but important, contribution philosophical speculation can have on research practice. In effect, I raise questions about the aim, function and role of social scientific knowledge. I argue that social scientific knowledge should, and can, contribute to the cause of human emancipation. The relationship between knowledge and emancipation is a necessary one due to the manner in which social practices are always-already grounded in forms of knowledge and belief. No social practice takes place in a conceptual vacuum and agents always have some account of what they are doing. However, the knowledge and beliefs possessed by agents may be incorrect and/or incomplete. Insofar as social science aims to correct the beliefs of agents, or provide a more complete account of their practices, then it has a potential emancipatory role to play. As already noted, however, this role is not universally accepted, hence we need a philosophical defence of the relationship between knowledge and emancipation.

In many respects my argument picks up, develops, and takes issue, with some of the themes raised in Alasdair MacIntyre's '*After Virtue*' (MacIntyre 1981). In '*After Virtue*' MacIntyre sees ethical deliberation as having been destabilised by the Enlightenment project. It was in the Enlightenment that scientism first got its foothold in the modern mind, and the thinkers of the era tried to ground everything in hard observed facts, or an even harder, abstract structural logic. The account of science that was to dominate the Enlightenment age was positivism (Kolakowski 1969). MacIntyre demonstrates how attempts to ground ethical and moral deliberation in a positivistic framework always end in emotivism (e.g., Hume). Emotivism, as MacIntyre defines it, is the 'doctrine that all evaluative judgments and more specifically all moral judgments are nothing but expressions of preference, expressions of attitude or feeling, insofar as they are moral or evaluative in character' (MacIntyre 1981: 10–11). Many of the reasons for the retreat to 'emotivism' are epistemological in form and perhaps the most consistent advocates of this position today are postmodern thinkers.

MacIntyre accepts many of these epistemological limits yet notes another problem at the heart of contemporary ethical discourse. According to MacIntyre, at the core of our post-Enlightenment age, and its associated scientism, is not only epistemological failure, but also a lack of 'telos'. The Enlightenment removed purpose and meaning from human existence, yet failed in its attempt to provide a robust epistemological framework that could take its place. Hence, one of the reasons for

the loss of ethical guidance is the absence of any understanding of what human life is for; that is, a loss of teleology. A fully disengaged reason has failed to produce a universal and rational set of ethical rules and norms; reason is unable to define ends, it can only give means. Reason alone simply cannot provide an answer to the question, 'what is human life for?' MacIntyre suggests that a return to Aristotelian notions of 'virtue' and 'purpose' can help reintroduce the lost telos to human life.

This issue is of interest to realist social scientists for two reasons. First, the relationship between science and emancipation is not only assumed in realist thought, but is intrinsic to it. Science as a specific mode of knowledge generation is a necessary, although not sufficient, condition for emancipation (Bhaskar 1986; Collier 1989). This science is not positivistic in form; hence critical realists have also claimed that their approach can avoid 'emotivism', whilst at the same time accepting 'epistemological relativism'. 'Epistemological relativism', realists argue, does not negate the possibility of 'judgemental rationalism'. Second, recent developments within realist philosophy have attempted to recover the sense of 'telos' that MacIntyre claims was lost throughout the Enlightenment.

This is most apparent in Bhaskar's theory of 'meta-reality' where the world that science (however defined) uncovers is claimed to be merely a very limited portion of reality (Bhaskar 2000, 2002a, 2002c). According to the theory of 'meta-reality' the deep structures uncovered by science (understood in critical realist terms), are still structures of duality and cannot access the world of the non-dual that is prior to, and constitutive of, the world we become cognisant of through scientific knowledge. The true source of oppression and alienation is our denial of the realm of the non-dual. True emancipation is nothing more than the acceptance of, and access to, the realm of the non-dual; a realm Bhaskar calls 'meta-reality'. Since science only deals with 'relative-reality' we need a different form of knowledge to access the realm of 'meta-reality'. Science, even in its critical realist form, is unable to penetrate the world of the non-dual and so it can never understand that emancipation is now fully dependent on accepting and accessing the realm of 'meta-real'. As Bhaskar puts it, '[p]hilosophies of non-identity, including critical realism, are restricted to the understanding of duality, of relative reality, incapable of penetrating to the zone of non-duality in which all the structures of duality … are entirely and unilaterally dependent' (Bhaskar 2002c: xxii). Moreover, the 'fact that there are non-dual conditions for emancipatory projects at the level of relative reality means that hitherto existing critical realism must always leave something, and its own conditions out'

(Bhaskar 2002c: xxiii). Hence the role of scientific knowledge in emancipation is severely limited.

This chapter takes issue with this theory of 'meta-reality' and attempts to explain the role of social scientific knowledge in emancipatory projects. The chapter also suggests that the kind of knowledge Bhaskar proposes we can have of 'meta-reality' is thoroughly individualistic in form, and if consistently followed, would lead not to collective action orientated towards emancipation, but individualistic introspection aimed only at self-realisation. Since science is dependent on its social aspect, the individual pursuance of knowledge of 'meta-reality' might jeopardise the attempt to gain social scientific knowledge. In fact, the theory of 'meta-reality' suggests that social scientists would be better employed in educating people in processes of self-realisation as opposed to attempting to discover how the world works: '[O]ur goal as educators, self-educators, is to be party to a process of being and creating and helping beings create themselves to be non-dual beings in a world of duality' (Bhaskar 2002c: 312).

The chapter proceeds by first looking in greater depth at the philosophical reasons underpinning the turn to emotivism and discusses MacIntyre's critique of this. I then outline a counter position based on ontological grounds, as opposed to attempting to resolve the difficult epistemological arguments that seem necessarily to lead to emotivism. Social scientific knowledge is necessary, but not sufficient, for emancipation, because the process of emancipation is intrinsically linked to knowledge of 'situations' out of which individual, or collective, actors wish to escape. In this sense, knowledge is not only necessary for emancipation, but (in part) constitutive of what emancipation is. I then examine Bhaskar's attempt to locate 'real' emancipation in a non-dual world that can only be accessed through a process of self-realisation. I argue that this move is both unnecessary and potentially dangerous for realist social science. It is unnecessary because the ontological arguments for the realm of the non-dual are unconvincing. It is potentially dangerous because it rests on a view of the individual that is diametrically opposed to that developed in the social ontology of critical realism (the TMSA) (Bhaskar 1979), and drastically reduces the role of social science in emancipatory projects. Bhaskar can only defend his view of self-realisation through positing a self that exists outside of time or place. A self that has no social properties, nor social position. A self, that is, that neither begins nor ends. A self that does indeed project 'man' [sic] as God (Bhaskar 2000). Science has no access to this self, hence its transformative capacity is severely circumscribed.

Knowledge and emancipation

The connection between knowledge and emancipation has a long and venerable history. Much of early Greek philosophy was dedicated to the search for a particular form of wisdom that combined epistemological and ethical issues in a close relationship. Knowledge was assumed to be essential to the achievement, and maintenance, of the 'happy life' (eudaimonia). 'Virtue', as Socrates put is, 'is knowledge' (Gulley 1968). Plato believed that knowledge was essential to the well-being of a just society; even if he limited the acquisition of this knowledge to a select few. Aristotle, also placed knowledge at the heart of his *Politics*. Aristotle's word for 'politics' is *politikê*, which is a contraction of *politikê epistêmê* or 'political science'. Aristotle believed that the desire to know was a natural characteristic of all men [sic]. In *Nicomachean Ethics* I.2 Aristotle portrays politics as the most authoritative of the practical sciences (Aristotle 1955).[4] Since politics governs the other sciences, their ends serve its end, which is the promotion of human good in all its forms. Politics and ethics, as practical sciences and producers, as well as consumers, of knowledge, help us to identify the correct ends of the good life and assist us to make the right choices in our everyday activities.

A radically different view of the relationship between knowledge and eudaimonia can also be found in ancient Greek philosophy. For Protagoras, 'man is the measure of all things'. Politics, ethics, religion, indeed, all systems of human belief, contain no universally valid truths. As such, the search for secure and firm knowledge on which to base the political community was actually a barrier to the achievement of eudiamonia. The only route to eudiamonia for Protagoras, was to adopt those beliefs that happen to prevail in our own community. A similar position can be found in the work of many of the sceptics. Pyrrho of Elis and Sextus Empiricus, for example, believed that the good life could only be founded on *epoche*, or suspension of judgement. Only by refusing either to affirm or to deny the truth of what we cannot know, can we achieve ataraxia (freedom from disturbance and pain). The foregrounding of *epoche* was not solely based on the theoretical arguments against the possibility of attaining knowledge, although undoubtedly these played a role. The principal reason was political; a politics founded on the suspension of judgement saves the thoughtful person from dogmatism and fanaticism and gives him/her undisturbed peace of mind.

Mysticism in various forms has also provided a criticism of the role of knowledge in the pursuance of human freedom. Here a rejection of the

hubris of man played a key role, insofar as it was believed that the attempt to inquire into 'ultimata' could only lead to disaster for humankind. Many ancient myths and tales suggest that human knowledge deployed in the production of man-made inventions were either dangerous or linked to evil (von Wright 1993). Again, these arguments were not epistemological, but ethical. The pursuit of knowledge could only lead to bad ends hence must be avoided. In many respects, this critique of the relationship between knowledge and emancipation can be described as epistemologically optimistic yet political pessimistic.

Organised religion provides another series of arguments against the search for sound and secure knowledge that is then deployed in the service of eudiamonia.[5] The desire to leave space in human affairs for faith clearly plays a role here, but Scholastic philosophy had attempted to show how faith could be supplemented by reason (Emery 1996). Michel de Montaigne and other sceptics, however, maintained that the existence of God and the immortality of the soul are incapable of proof; they must be accepted by faith (Montaigne 1993). Montaigne argued that faith provides a sufficient foundation for religion and requires no further supporting reasons (Popkin 1979). As pithily put by Montaigne, 'there is a plague on Man' and this is the conviction that 'he knows something' (Montaigne 1993).[6] When confronted with the sheer weight of arguments in favour of scientific truths, such as those in support of the emerging Copernican theory of the solar system, the Church took an instrumentalist way out, arguing that these theories were useful, but not necessarily true. Hence Cardinal Bellarmine informed Galileo that the teaching of the heliocentric system, and its subsequent application, was to be allowed only on condition that it was presented as a hypothetical system, a tool for saving the phenomena, and not as a truth about the world. Since any attempt to present it as a truth could lead to 'injure our holy faith by contradicting the scriptures' (quoted in Niiniluoto 2002). This instrumentalism necessarily had a conservative political function in the attempt to safeguard existing states of affairs from any radical reforms that might be suggested on the basis of scientific knowledge. The same instrumentalist position arises in many of the various forms of positivism. Pierre Duhem provides a good example, arguing that his commitment to instrumentalism is the 'physics of a believer' (Duhem 1954).

The Enlightenment represents the high point of the belief in the use of reason and knowledge to promote desirable political and social ends. However, this can only be understood in the context of what preceded it. In many respects Enlightenment thinking can be understood as

reiteration of the ideals elaborated by Plato and Aristotle. As a historically located mode of thought, however, it emerges in a era that was both attempting to throw off the shackles of dogma and fanaticism, whilst at the same time attempting to come to grips with a new political order where power was concentrated in the form of the modern state. The seventeenth century was marked by witch-hunts, wars of religion, imperial conquest and political change. Protestants and Catholics denounced each other as supporters of Satan, and people could be detained for attending the wrong church, or for not attending at all. All publications were subject to prior censorship by both church and state, often working closely together. Slavery was extensively practiced, particularly in the colonial plantations of the Western Hemisphere, and its brutality frequently defended by leading religious figures (Daly 2002; Tise 1987). The despotism of the new monarchs, now possessing far greater powers than any medieval king, was supported by the doctrine of the 'divine right of kings' embedded within the treaty of Westphalia (1648) and scriptures were quoted to show that revolution was detested by God (Figgis 2003). State and religion had arrived at an accommodation acceptable to both. Speakers of sedition or blasphemy found themselves imprisoned, or even executed. Organisations that tried to confront the twin authorities of church and state were proscribed. There had always been intolerance and dogma in previous eras, but the emergence of the modern state made its tyranny much more efficient and powerful. To some this process set in chain a series of events that was to lead directly to the Holocaust (Bauman 1991; Adorno and Horkheimer 1973).

It was perhaps inevitable that Europe would begin to tire of the repression and warfare carried out in the name of absolute truth. It is not surprising that people torn between demanding, and dogmatic, faiths would question whether any of the churches were deserving of the authority they demanded. In many respects, radical doubt was necessary for the new sort of 'certainty' that science would bring. The good scientist is the one prepared to test all assumptions, to confront all traditional opinion, to get closer to the truth. If ultimate truth, such as that claimed by religious thinkers, was unattainable by scientists, so much the better. In a sense, the strength of science is that it is always aware of its limits, aware that knowledge is always growing, always subject to change, never absolute. Because scientific knowledge depends on evidence and reason, arbitrary authority can only be its enemy.

The development of Enlightenment thought was not solely reactive. Intellectual developments also played their role in bringing about social change. Key here was René Descartes' placing of the self at the centre of

epistemology (Descartes 1984). The internalising of rationality within that self initiates an inevitable slide that results in the loss of authority in anything external to the individual. This had not been Descartes intention. Descartes had attempted to use reason to legitimate and defend his faith. He tried to begin with a blank slate; with the minimum of knowledge necessary; the ineluctable awareness of his own existence. From there he attempted to reason his way to a complete defence of Christianity, but eventually his successors over the centuries were to slowly disintegrate his gains, even finally challenging the notion of selfhood with which he had begun (Sarkar 2003). The history of philosophy from Descartes to the early twentieth century is, to a large extent, the story of more and more imaginative philosophical turns each proving less and less, until Ludwig Wittgenstein finally succeeded in undermining the very bases of philosophy itself (Bhaskar 1994).

The individualisation of epistemology reaches its high point in those radical Enlightenment thinkers for whom the pursuit of pleasure and the avoidance of pain become the centre of our ethical universe (Bentham 1996). In sum, ethical and epistemological thought throughout the Enlightenment was successively reduced to the subjective and the individual. The teleological basis for behaviour was replaced by the gratification of desire; and instrumental reason is the tool deployed to that end. There is no place for a *telos* outside of the individual, no place for a higher goal and no place for the social or the goals of society.

Indeed, we are prompted to be individualists and to be free of the influence of anything outside of ourselves unless we choose to be so influenced. The self that is presupposed in these assumptions is the disengaged self that looks upon itself, and the world, with a disinterested eye; in other words it is the self of Cartesian dualism, which becomes the methodological individualist of much contemporary social theory (Scribner 1996; Udehn 2001). The dualism of body and soul is transformed, in a modern materialist age that has no need for a substance called the soul, into the dualism of thought and feeling. This fragmented self is the means of its own creation; it and it alone is to decide the question of being. The shallow asocial nature of this invented self is evident in the contemporary quest for an individual to produce themselves as a work of art based on mimicry of the glamorous elements of popular culture (Zizek 1999). If we cannot actually have our promised 15 minutes of fame, we can at least copy the lifestyles of the rich and famous. Perhaps the utmost crisis of our postmodern age is that of individuals formed in such a fashion, allied to the pretence that a social narrative does not also form them. This belief in a self-created individual

makes them blind to the narratives that do create them; that of the capitalist global economy and its associated forms of life. This alienation from the self and from the narratives of community life is also alienation from the understanding of eudemonia because virtue is now disconnected from the sources that have guided life in previous generations. To many critics, the Enlightenment has run its course; we are spiritually marooned, devoid of a tradition of wisdom, lacking an understanding of virtue and disconnected from the transcendent. To many religious thinkers the atomistic self is the cause of the rise of all manner of social ills; wars, greed, avarice, and violence in our cities. How easy it is to then conclude that emancipation must begin with a realignment of this self.

Essentially this subjectivism mirrors the critique of the Enlightenment advanced by the Romantics. The Romantics attacked the Enlightenment because it blocked the free play of the emotions and creativity. It had turned man [sic] into a soulless, thinking machine – a robot. Christianity, for all its faults had at least formed a coherent structure of beliefs into which medieval man/woman situated themselves. The Enlightenment replaced this Christian matrix with the mechanical framework of Newtonian natural philosophy. For the Romantic, the outcome was nothing less than the demotion of the individual. Imagination, sensitivity, feelings, spontaneity and freedom were stifled. Consequently, man must liberate himself from these intellectual chains. Like their intellectual fathers, such as Jean Jacques Rousseau, the Romantics longed to recover human freedom. The habits, values, rules and standards imposed by society with a faith grounded exclusively in reason had to be abandoned. '*Man is born free and everywhere he is in chains*', Rousseau had declared. Whereas the Enlightenment thinkers saw humanity united through the possession of a common Reason, the Romantics saw diversity and uniqueness. Discover yourself – express yourself, cried the Romantic. Paint your own personal vision, live, love and suffer in your own way. Kant's Enlightenment call to arms, '*Sapere aude', 'Dare to know!'* was replaced by the battle cry of the Romantics, *'Dare to be!'* Despite the Romantic critique of the Enlightenment, however, their radical commitment to the individual meant that they effectively accepted the subjectivisation of epistemology begun by Descartes. Indeed, in many respects, they radicalised this subjectivisation of social life and carried it through to its logical conclusion.

For many later Enlightenment thinkers the individualisation of society was both politically and ethically a good thing. The subjectivist epistemology, however, was not, and the commitment to objectivity, reason

and logic needed to be upheld in a truth that was higher than the individual. The rejection of religion meant that this higher truth could not be found in a transcendent realm, but rather, had to be constructed out of the resources available to man [sic]. Science seemed the obvious answer. This is really what drove many of the early positivists (Kolakowski 1969). Although positivism is often linked with conservativism in contemporary social theory many of those initially involved in its development were keen to outline an account of science that could withstanding newly emerging forms of irrationalism.

Yet despite their all too laudable intentions, the positivists were locked in the problem-field set by Hume. This entailed that they accept his hard distinction between facts and values. This was of little concern as long as the epistemological products of the programme were secure. Certainly, there could be no direct move from facts to values, but as long as knowledge was grounded in universal principles of reason and experience, then it could at least provide the framework within which ethical discussion could take place. The epistemological basis of positivism, however, was to come under severe attack. Philosophers of science uncovered hidden social dimensions to knowledge, and sociologists of science revealed its pretensions. Critics like Stanley Aronowitz saw science not as the realisation of universal reason but simply as an ideology with a power that extends well beyond its own institutions. According to Aronowitz, '[w]e are witnessing the slow, discontinuous breakup of the old world-view according to which physical science offers context-free knowledge of the external world' (Aronowitz 1988: 265). Likewise, for Andrew Ross, '[i]t is safe to say that many of the founding certitudes of modern science have been demolished' (Ross 1991: 11). Eventually these attacks would lead to what became known as the 'science wars' in which the two modes of thought on the epistemology-emancipation conundrum would engage in open warfare (Parsons 2003; Sokal and Bricmont 1999). This all took place in an environment structured by newly emerging forms of scepticism, but now taking the name of post-modernism. The overall effect, however, was a wholesale critique of knowledge which has now left us with nothing but emotivism. And this is an emotivism that reigns supreme not only in the ethical realm but also in the epistemological realm. Even facts, are now said to be nothing more than expressions of power, preference, attitude or feeling (Foucault 1984a, 1984b).

For MacIntyre the moral problem is self-evident: opinions and arguments surrounding 'just war', 'poverty', and 'capital punishment', seem only to lead to harsh and unproductive debate. Why is it that we are

unable to resolve these moral dilemmas? MacIntyre accepts the view that science can be of no help to us in this area. The problem he argues is that some hidden upheaval, by which he clearly means the Enlightenment, has undermined moral reasoning, so that all we have now are words like 'good' and 'moral' and 'useful' deployed independent of their social and political contexts, surviving only as memory traces of a era long passed. These words and the patterns of behaviour they embody have a history and an origin that has been lost as a result of Enlightenment belief in reason and science. Once reason and science have been shown to be inadequate however, we continue to use these words without knowing their true meaning. To illustrate this he provides an allegory, similar in many respects to Plato's Cave.

MacIntyre asks us to imagine a world where a series of environmental disasters turns the public violently against the natural sciences. In such a world widespread riots occur, laboratories are burnt down, physicists are lynched, books and instruments are destroyed and a political movement takes power and abolishes science teaching in schools and universities, imprisoning and executing the remaining scientists. Eventually, however, a counter-movement emerges against this destructive movement and enlightened people seek to restore science, although they have largely forgotten what it was. All that they now possess are scattered fragments of a practice currently forgotten: a knowledge of the practice of science detached from any knowledge of the theoretical, or social, context that gave them significance. Nonetheless these fragments are rearticulated in a set of practices that go under the revived names of physics, chemistry and biology. There is public argument about the relative merits of relativity theory and evolutionary biology, for example, yet the new participants to the debate only possess a very partial knowledge of each. Nobody is aware that what they are doing is not natural science in any proper sense at all. For everything that they do and say used to conform to certain standards of consistency and coherence; but now those contexts which are required to make sense of what they are doing have been lost, perhaps irretrievably. The key loss for MacIntyre is teleology. As he puts it:

> Since the whole point of ethics – both as a theoretical and a practical discipline – is to enable man to pass from his present state to his true end, the elimination of any notion of essential human nature and with it the abandonment of any notion of *telos* leaves behind a moral scheme composed of two remaining elements whose relationship become quite unclear. (MacIntyre 1981: 62)

The idea of a *telos* is fundamental to MacIntyre's proposed solution. Teleology is concerned with the study of final causes, purposes goals and aims. Aristotle presents the best, and most coherent, exponent of this approach, welding a broad and sophisticated account of causation to a particular account of ethics. After scientific advances embodied in the work of Newton and Darwin, however, teleological explanations seemed anachronistic in form. Newton, for example, rejected teleological explanations of motion in favour of an account based on the outcome of mechanical laws. Likewise Darwin suggested that natural selection was the result of a series of 'mechanisms' that explained organic development in terms of 'functions'. Allied to these advances in science are a wholesale philosophical rejection of teleological explanations and the general acceptance of a Humean account of cause. Stripped of an account of teleology both Aristotle's *science* and his ethics lack a secure grounding. Human life was now thought to be wholly driven by what had preceded it, not what was to come.

According to MacIntyre the rejection of teleological concepts in ethical discourse has been *the* catastrophe of the modern age. In the Aristotelian ethical tradition, there is, he argues, an essential contrast between man-as-he-happens-to-be and man-as-he-could-be-if-he-realised-his-essential-nature. This distinction, of course, is very reminiscent of Rousseau and it figures also in Marx. Without this important distinction, Aristotle's ethical theory provides no guidance on the good life. But if the distinction were to be acknowledged we would have to regard words such as 'good' as factual information about man as he could be if he realised his essential nature. The rejection of Aristotelian teleology entails the rejection of a framework whereby evaluative language can be seen as conveying factual information. And according to MacIntyre the consequences of the rejection could not have been more destructive to ethical deliberation. Nowhere is this clearer than in Kant, supposedly one of the great moral philosophers of the Enlightenment age. Kant argues that there is a deep incompatibility between an account of action that recognises the role of moral imperatives in governing action and causal types of explanation. Hence Kant is compelled to the conclusion that actions obeying and embodying moral imperatives are inexplicable and unintelligible from the standpoint of science (Kant 1934).[7]

Critical realism has always rejected this dichotomous view and attempted to link facts and values in a sophisticated way. In general this has involved rearticulating the relationship between knowledge and ethics largely on a return to an imprecisely defined Aristotelian account

of causation. Equally critical realists, in common with many Marxists, accept the distinction between 'man-as-he-happens-to-be and man-as-he-could-be-if-he-realised-his-essential-nature'. But this distinction has normally been fleshed out in terms of something like Marx's notion of species being (Marx 1844/1975: 327) with the emphasis placed on the material substrate that binds us together as members of a collective species. Bhaskar's recent work, however, has gone further than this and locates a realm of being that transcends our material existence. He calls this 'meta-reality' and it constitutes a realm of being within which we are all involved, but which escapes our attention due to the repressive structures society enfolds around us. This approach is properly teleological because it posits a realm of existence where our 'true' being exists; and our purpose in life is to access this being. The true path to emancipation according to this account resides in the enlightenment of the self in the process of self-realisation. Social emancipation can only scratch the surface of our oppression and only if we achieve self-realisation can we be truly emancipated.

There are striking parallels between the development of Bhaskar's work and that of MacIntyre. Both began their intellectual journeys as Marxists. MacIntyre's first book, *Marxism: An Interpretation*, draws a parallel between Christianity and Marxism, a parallel that Bhaskar was to rearticulate in FEW (MacIntyre 1953; Bhaskar 2000). Both have rejected Humean injunctions against facts informing values and both have argued for teleology to be placed at the heart of ethical discourse. Bhaskar's approach however, has been the subject of much criticism from realist thinkers who argue that his spiritual turn might actually constitute a negative influence on the development of realist social theory. For the social ontology that is at the heart of realist social theory has no place for the realm of 'meta-reality'. Moreover the suggestion that emancipation begins and ends in the process of self-realisation seems to suggest the end of all collective projects aimed at bringing about emancipation. In this sense Bhaskar's spiritual turn might indicate the end of realist social science if it were to be consistently followed by realist social theorists.

The ontology of emancipation

There are three arguments, then, against the view that knowledge, and by implication science, can be deployed in the service of emancipation. First, there are those arguments that place a sharp divide between facts and values. Second, are arguments that suggest reliable knowledge of

social processes, and perhaps even of natural ones, is unattainable. Third, are arguments based on the lack of a 'telos'; hence the absence of purpose to human life makes ultimate decisions about the good impossible. These arguments, although distinct, are mutually implicated. For example, there is little point in attempting to come to know the purpose, or meaning, of life if no such purpose exists. Likewise, even if there were such a purpose, if we could not know it, of what use could it be? And even if there were a 'telos' and could know it, if there was no relationship between facts and values what could we do with such knowledge? Critical realists have, on various grounds, taken issue with all of these positions.

First, it is argued that facts and values are linked. Second, knowledge is possible, although the form it may take will differ according to the object domain under study. Third, there is a purpose to life; although this has generally been the least developed, and it has it is generally taken a minimalist form in terms of the sheer value of life itself (in whatever form) (Collier 1999). These issues, although important, are all supplementary to an underlying ontological issue that is already well-developed within critical realism and which demonstrates the ineluctable link between facts and values, whilst at the same time giving a telos to human activity without positing a life beyond the here and now. This is the nature of social life itself and the role of knowledge within that process. This still leaves outstanding questions concerning knowledge production of this ontology, yet there is little point in engaging in complex epistemological discussion unless we can first show why such knowledge might be necessary in order to further the cause of emancipation.

All social activity takes place in a social setting that we can call society. According to Foucault society is

> a complex and independent reality that has its own laws and mechanisms of reaction, its regulations as well as its possibility of disturbance. This new reality is society. … It becomes necessary to reflect upon it, upon its specific characteristics, its constants and its variables. (Foucault 1984a: 242)

The implication of this is that society has a form with specific modes of operation that is distinct from whatever preceded it, or out of which it emerged. Critical realists have done much to elaborate on this notion. According to Bhaskar, society can be seen to be both the ever-present condition, that is the material cause, and the continually reproduced outcome of human agency. All social practices have an action and a

structural aspect that is integral to practice. All social practices take place within a set of conditions that enable certain actions and constrain others. The conditions come in various differentiated forms and encompass what Bhaskar calls the four planes within which social activity takes place. In no particular order of theoretical or practical importance are first, our material transactions with nature.

The word nature here needs to be handled with care. The central point is that all social life has a material aspect, but there is no reason to suppose that this will always be with objects that are natural. Many material objects are socially constructed; weapons, buildings, and technology, for example; yet these objects clearly play a role in structuring social life. At its most fundamental level our biological constitution means the material side of human affairs is never wholly absent, even if, as is probably the case with biology, it plays a minimal role. At times, however, the material aspect of social life can be the most pressing – poverty and war for example. There are many social theoretic approaches that neglect, or ignore, this material aspect to social life and there are those that attempt to sharply differentiate between material structure and social structure. Critical realism rejects these attempts to divide the social from the material and insists that all human activity takes place within material conditions, that are/might themselves be changed as a result of that activity. Environmental degradation as a result of industrialisation provides a good example of how social practices can have a major impact on the material world, which then forms one of the conditions out of which further activity will emerge. This insistence on an ever-present material dimension to social life is one of the factors that links critical realism to Marxism.

Second, is the plane of intra/intersubjective activity. This represents that aspect of social life that we share in common with other humans. This is not a territorial designation but rather delineates, at its most basic, the realm of meaning. It can be shared rules and norms, but it also importantly represents language; an important (to many the most important) aspect of social life. The third plane is that of social roles. These are the specific roles individuals play through their social lives. As such, any particular individual may be playing multiple roles at any one point in time and the types of roles they can be asked to play will vary across time and place. The realm of intersubjective phenomena governs social roles but they are not the same as it. Hence for example, a Head of Department is one social role that is occupied by an individual at a given point in time. This social role gives the occupant certain forms of power not available to others in the same organisation, but not occupying that role. What governs the dynamic of this role is intersubjective

understandings, but simply to possess these understandings does not mean one occupies that role; hence the two, although related, are distinct. The fourth plane of social activity is that of personal subjectivity. How the role of Head of Department is undertaken depends upon the specific individual that occupies that role; hence neither the role, the intersubjective understandings that govern it, nor the material context in which the role is situated determine the practice of the role.

If most critical realists would be happy with the inclusion of these four planes of social activity there would not be unanimous agreement on what the term structure refers to. Some see structure as residing in the relations between social roles (Porpora 1987). Indeed Bhaskar has begun to refer to his plane of social roles as the plane of social structure (Bhaskar 2002a: 99). Others prefer to see structure in terms of intersubjective understandings. My view is that since all four planes have an impact on social life then structure can be considered to be the relations between the planes; it is the relations between the conditions for activity that constitute the structures of the social world (Bhaskar 1979: 34–36). 'Our social being', as Andrew Collier puts it, 'is constituted by relations and our social acts presuppose them' (Collier 1994: 140). This view of structure links the four planes of social activity together to form a totality. As the dynamic of social life unfolds, however, the interplay between the four planes changes. Since all four planes are necessary for social life, indeed we could say they constitute it, all four need to be incorporated into our theoretical models. This means that we can have no overarching theory that causally explains social life since the factors that drive it are constantly changing.

At any particular moment in time, an individual may be implicated in all manner of relations each exerting its own peculiar causal tendencies and often individuals are unaware of the structure of relations within which they are embedded. This 'lattice-work' of relations can be said to constitute the structure of particular societies, but also the structure that enables and constrains all forms of social activity, and it is possible to envisage the study of these enduring relations despite changes in the individuals occupying them. That is, the relations – the structures – are ontologically distinct from the individuals who enter into them. There is, as Bhaskar puts it, 'an ontological hiatus between society and people' (Bhaskar 1979: 46). Importantly, seeing structure in terms of the relations that bind the planes of social activity together allows us to theoretically maintain material and ideational elements in one coherent account.

However, if there is an 'ontological hiatus' between society and people, we need to elaborate on the relationship between them. This is an issue, which although alluded to in Bhaskar's model of society (the TMSA), is poorly developed. He notes it only in passing and refers to this mediating aspect as a series of 'positioned-practices' (Bhaskar 1979: 51). But beyond this there is little in terms of further development of this concept. Pierre Bourdieu's notion of *habitus* can be helpful here since it provides a more developed account of what this mediating aspect of social life might be. There are also sound reasons for using Bourdieu in this way since there are strong arguments that his general approach to social science is realist in form. Moreover, Bourdieu's *habitus* is but one aspect of his social ontology and he insists on the reality of objective structures that shape behaviour. Hence his approach is not what Margaret Archer calls a 'central conflation' model (Archer 1995).

Bourdieu is primarily concerned with what individuals do in their daily lives. Like Bhaskar he is keen to refute the idea that social activity can be understood solely in terms of individual decision-making, or, as determined by supra-individual structures. His notion of the *habitus* can be viewed as a bridge-building exercise across the explanatory gap between these two extremes. The *habitus* can only be understood in relation to his notion of a 'social field'. According to Bourdieu a social field is a network, or a configuration, of objective relations between positions objectively defined (Bourdieu 1990: 14). A social field refers to a structured system of relationally defined social positions occupied by either individuals and/or institutions – the nature of which defines the situation for their occupants and limits and/or facilitates certain practices. This involves recognition of the centrality of objective relations to social analysis (Bourdieu 1990: 122, 125).

What then is a *habitus*, or in Bhaskar's terminology a 'position practice' system? One way of viewing this notion is as a mediating link between individuals' subjective worlds and the socio-cultural world into which they are born and which they share with others. The power of the *habitus* derives from the thoughtlessness of habit and habituation, rather than consciously learned rules (Bourdieu 1977: 12–14). A crucial distinction that Bourdieu draws is that between learning and socialisation (Bourdieu 1977: 12–14). The *habitus* is imprinted and encoded in a socialising process that commences during early childhood. The *habitus* is inculcated more by experience than explicit teaching. Socially competent performances are produced as a matter of routine, without explicit reference to a body of codified knowledge, and without the

actors necessarily knowing what they are doing (in the sense of being able to adequately explain what they are doing). Hence for Bourdieu

> Each agent, wittingly or unwittingly, willy nilly, is a producer and reproducer of objective meaning. … It is because subjects do not, strictly speaking, know what they are doing that what they do has more meaning than they know. (Bourdieu 1977: 79)

The habitus can be seen as the 'site of the internalisation of reality and the externalisation of internality' (Bourdieu 1977: 205). Adding the *habitus* to the TMSA gives us a three-tiered social ontology (see Figure 2.1).

All three levels are necessary to explain social practices and these practices in turn reproduce and/or transform the various elements; hence the two-way arrows between practices and the levels. Social action occurs in large part due to the knowledge and beliefs about social situations that are shared by groups of people and individuals. However, roles, rules, and relations, structure behaviour in ways that are sometimes

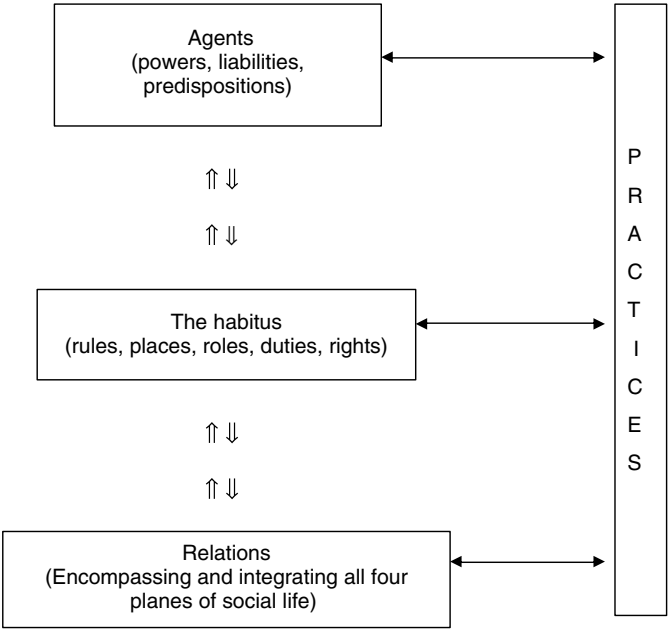

Figure 2.1 Sources of social practices

opaque to consciousness, decisions, or choices. And it is this opacity that gives social science a critical impulse insofar as the agents, whose activities are necessary for the reproduction of these relations, may be unaware of the social relations in which they are embedded. It is through the capacity of social science to illuminate such relations that it may come to play a role in emancipatory practices.

Given this social ontology we can now see clearly (and ontologically) just why knowledge is necessary for emancipation.

Figure 2.2 can be considered a very simplistic model of the agent–structure–habitus relationship and the arrows going from agent to structures and vice versa illustrate how each and every social act is a product of both dimensions and that all social practices occur within a *habitus*. In terms of understanding emancipation the model demonstrates the naivety of any view that posits a realm of freedom devoid of social context.

Insofar as social contexts enable some outcomes and constrain others then there are always going to be limits to the forms emancipation can take. There is simply no social realm where differential forms of power are absent. Emancipation is not freedom, at least not in the sense of being free from all constraints, but rather, it can only be understood as the transition from an unwanted, unnecessary and oppressive situation to a wanted and/or needed situation (Bhaskar 1989b: 6). This is a processual view that highlights the necessity of knowledge of prevailing structures. Knowledge is intrinsic to emancipation. In order for emancipation to be possible knowledge is necessary so that we might *know* the situation

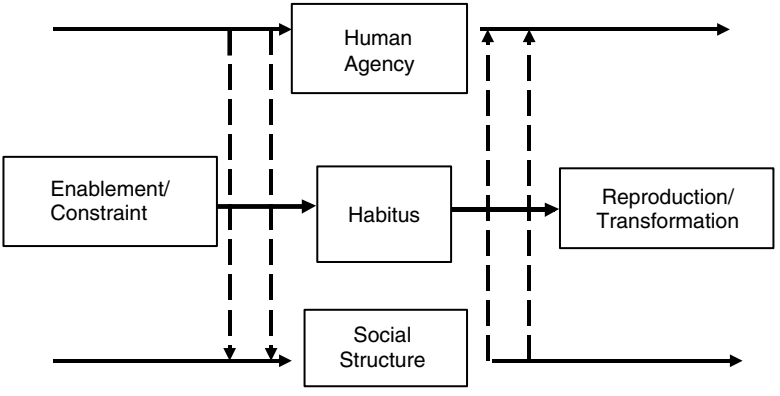

Figure 2.2 The agent-structure-habitus relationship

we are in; *know* that it is unwanted or unnecessary; and *know* the potential possibilities within the present social field. The social context in which we operate will not permit any and every practice, and we might desire a social formation that the logics of prevailing structures make impossible.

If knowledge is necessary for emancipation, however, it is not sufficient for it and there may well be real impediments to the implementation of any policies we attempt to apply and outcomes of policies might not be as expected. The social field is characterised by a radical indeterminacy and contingency; there may well be limits to what can be achieved within given social structures and we cannot know that our attempts will succeed. The model does, however, help highlight those moments in the social process that are necessary for emancipatory practice as well as indicating those that might rupture attempts at it. These are highlighted in Figure 2.3.

This model signifies the social process over time with agents drawing on antecedent materials in the course of their practices. The possession of adequate knowledge can help at each of the indicated points if we are to understand the move from unwanted practices to more desirable ones. At points 1, 1a and 2, unintended consequences and unacknowledged conditions limit the actor's understanding of their social world, while unacknowledged motivation and tacit skills (3 and 4 in the diagram) limit their understanding of themselves. Knowledge has an emancipatory

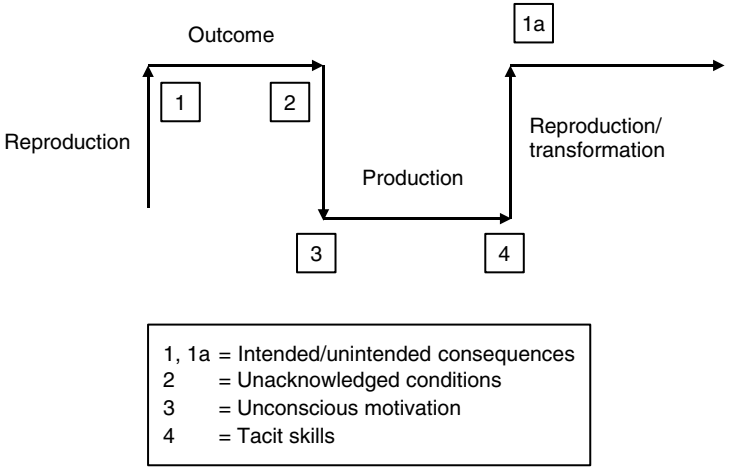

Figure 2.3 The social process over time

role to play at each of the points and at 1 and 4 in the form of more adequate praxis. Moreover, as this is a process in time, structures and agents both have a history, and history both limits and enables the kind of access individuals may gain to the deep structures.

We can only build the future out of the present and the future we can build is constrained and enabled by the possibilities embedded within existing structures. Knowledge of prevailing structural configurations is vital if we are to formulate adequate policies for dealing with all social practices that we would like to change.

Having an ontological argument able to demonstrate the need for social knowledge in emancipatory projects is an important step, it does not however, answer the question of whether knowledge of such hidden dimensions is possible, and how we might reach judgements on competing knowledge claims. This is now the terrain of epistemology. Epistemology is a vital aspect of the research enterprise. Its value, however, is a posterior, and always-in relation to specific knowledge claims; claims which are ontological and which are derived from the application of particular methodological techniques within an ontological context. As such, a theorist, or researcher, has no chosen epistemological position prior to making a particular knowledge claim, and the particular epistemological support advanced for any given assertion will vary depending on the content of that claim. Epistemological debate in science never operates in an ontological void.[8]

In the social sciences we may never 'know', at least not in an absolute sense, that any given account is correct. Hence, we may be unable to decisively decide, for example, between an account of the causes of international terrorism that privileges issues of language and identity over an account that foregrounds material factors and national interest. Of course, when confronted with these two accounts, we can, and do, compare them, and we reach personal and collective judgements about them. And we do so on the basis of a range of epistemological supports that the various accounts present. What we are unable to say with absolute certainty is that one is right and the other wrong. In this respect, the social sciences are never going to have the same epistemological status as the natural sciences. We may, on the basis of the evidence, prefer one account to the other and in making this choice we will ultimately assess the arguments on either side. Yet, the fact that we can never know that a given account is correct is an epistemological situation we would face even if we had only one account.

Often in the social sciences we find scholars tightly wedded to what I have elsewhere called the 'foundational fallacy' (Wight 1996).[9] According

to this dogma, if we cannot have absolute untarnished access to knowledge, there can be no knowledge. This position is untenable and unnecessary. As William James has argued, 'when we give up the doctrine of objective certitude, we do not thereby give up the quest or hope of truth itself' (James 1956: 17).

As Susan Haack suggests, what we really do when addressing epistemological questions is something much less ambitious than hope to attain certain infallible knowledge, but something altogether more optimistic than the epistemological nihilism of deep scepticism (Haack 1993). For Haack, epistemological justification is really a matter of 'A is more/less justified in believing' something (Haack 1993: 2). All knowledge as a human produce is potentially fallible, but this does not entail that all knowledge claims are equally valid. Rejecting the idea that knowledge is an all or nothing affair, then, and following Roderick Chisholm (1989), I suggest that, in fact, we conceive of an epistemic hierarchy:

6. Certain
5. Obvious
4. Evident
3. Beyond Reasonable Doubt
2. Epistemically in the Clear
1. Probable
0. Counterbalanced
−1. Probably false
−2. In the Clear to Disbelieve
−3. Reasonable to Disbelieve
−4. Evidently False
−5. Obviously False
−6. Certainly False.

Such an approach is not without its problems, not least because the meaning of all of the above 'levels of knowledge' would be susceptible to multiple interpretations. However, the epistemic hierarchy does allow us to follow Norbert Elias and reject static polarities such as 'true' and 'false'. Contrary to a dichotomous view of knowledge claims, Elias argues that 'theoretical and empirical knowledge becomes more extensive, more correct, and more adequate' (Elias 1978: 53).[10]

In fact, as far as the actual practices of scientists are concerned, as opposed to philosophical descriptions of them, their activities tend to lend support to the view of epistemological eclecticism advanced here. That is, they appear to operate with epistemological positions functioning

as 'rules of thumb' rather than all or nothing positions. The process is one where the scientist begins by using one rule of thumb, but if it fails to work, they introduce another. These rules of thumb argues Paul Feyerabend constitute a 'toolbox'.

> I mean, it's just like rules of thumb: shall I use this rule now, shall I use that rule? Popper introduced into the toolbox the rule of falsification. His fault was to assume this is the only useful instrument, the only useful tool to apply to theories, instead of saying, 'Well, we have increased our tool box.' Never throw away the tool box, never declare the tool box itself to be the one right thing or one tool in it, but use it, extend it, disregard it sometimes, according to the case with which you are dealing, because you never know what you will run into. (Feyerabend 1995: 123)

This account presents scientists as little more than epistemological opportunists whose actual practices bear little or no relation to the dogmatic accounts produced by philosophers of science. Einstein makes this opportunism explicit, '[c]ompare a scientist with an epistemologist; a scientist faces a complicated situation. So in order to get some value in this situation he cannot use a simple rule, he has to be an opportunist' (Feyerabend 1995: 117).

This account of epistemology is very different from dominant models that circulate within the contemporary social sciences. It is common, for example, to find social scientists referring to such things as a 'feminist epistemology' a 'positivist epistemology' or a 'postmodern epistemology'. When used in this way it is easy to see epistemologies as mutually exclusive. If you are a feminist researcher you will adopt the epistemology that feminists adopt. Likewise a positivist will have their epistemology and a postmodernist theirs. This seems confused and neglects the manner in which researchers use a range of epistemological supports to defend specific knowledge claims. It also enables a context where advocates of differing approaches can safeguard their claims from external critique by claiming that they are not subject to the same epistemological criteria. Epistemologies thus become mutually exclusive. However, to be a feminist involves much more than a commitment to a certain epistemology. It requires stepping into an ontological and political universe too. In fact, to think of epistemology in terms mutually exclusive world views is consistent with the epistemic fallacy; it suggests, for example, that what is (for the feminist, for example), is what is known. Rejecting this view, critical realists put 'epistemology in its

place' and situate all epistemological claims in an ontological context. Philosophers can happily debate the relative merits of a given epistemology in the abstract if they desire, and certainly, social scientists can learn valuable insights about the limits of various epistemological positions from these inquiries. Yet, I doubt that philosophers will ever conclusively demonstrate the validity of any one epistemology over others. Hence, social scientists have no need to adopt an epistemology in advance of specific knowledge claims.

Emancipation and the spiritual turn

Given the centrality of knowledge to processes of emancipation it is not surprising that realists have attempted to theorise the link between science and emancipation. The commitment to science is embedded within a philosophical journey that has four stages. First, was an account of natural science (transcendental realism). Second, was a consideration of the human sciences (critical naturalism) in the context of the account of the natural sciences; the melding of these two accounts was given the name critical realism (CR). Third, was Dialectical development of critical realism (DCR). Fourth, was the latest and perhaps most radical development when a spiritual element was introduced as an attempt to introduce a notion of transcendence; this is known as transcendental dialectical critical realism (TDCR). These four stages can be linked to the argument of this chapter in the following way.

Transcendental realism, the account of the natural sciences, provides a justification for certain forms of knowledge in a non-positivist framework; thus inter alia, opening up the possibility of a non-emotivist position on both ethics and epistemology. Critical naturalism, the application of transcendental realism to the social sciences, provides an account of society that demonstrates the necessity of knowledge to emancipation. Dialectical critical realism (in part) attempts to bring knowledge and emancipation closer together through the development of what are known as explanatory critiques; these are critiques of existing conditions which also explain them, thus potentially informing action orientated towards emancipation on the basis of such critiques. In DRC absence was the core motif and emancipation was defined as the absenting of absences to human fulfillment. Social science played a key role in this process since it was given a central role in the identification of appropriate absences and, it was hoped, would indicate ways to absent them. Transcendental dialectical critical realism provides the missing teleological dimension. Transcendental dialectical critical realism was first articulated

in *From East to West*. In this Bhaskar argues that, '[n]othing in this book involves the rejection of any existing (dialectical) critical realist position' (Bhaskar 1999: ix). This suggests that the commitment to social science remains. However, there are two ways in which I think the relationship between CR and TDCR is highly problematic.[11]

First, TDCR adds nothing to the account of social science developed in critical realism. Second, the themes developed in TDCR actually represent a rejection of important aspects of critical realism hence constitute a threat to it. In short, realist social scientists have nothing to gain from engaging with TDCR and perhaps much to lose. This means that realist social scientists cannot afford to adopt a neutral stance on TDCR.

It is important to be clear on just what I am arguing here. I am not suggesting that Bhaskar should not have moved into the terrain of TDCR. As a writer, he has a right to engage with any issue that interests him. However, TDCR is not presented as just an area of interest, but a truth of the world, and crucially, a truth that underpins all other truths. Thus if realists accept the truth of TDCR then they must, if they are to remain consistent with their philosophical system, act on the basis of that truth. 'There is no alternative to the truth, at whatever level it informs your practice, if your practice is to be efficacious' (Bhaskar 2002c: 16). Realist social scientists cannot accept TDCR and carry on as normal, because what emancipation is and how we might attain it is radically different in TDCR. The world, to put it bluntly, has changed. Nowhere is this clearer than in two concepts which are at the heart of critical realism but which are now to be discarded; hence '[t]he emphasis on identity of course means that the idea of existential intransitivity and referential detachment must go' (Bhaskar 2002a: xv).

From East to West represents Bhaskar's first attempt to develop TDCR. This has been further developed through two further publications; *Meta-Reality*, and from *Science to Emancipation*, both published in 2002. The latter is interesting in terms of the ambiguity embedded within the title. Does it, for example, mean that we need science in order to move towards emancipation, or does it mean that we have now moved *from* science to emancipation? In order to reach emancipation must we leave science behind? My belief is that the latter interpretation is the only one consistent with the arguments of *Meta-Reality*.

In his first book, *A Realist Theory of Science* (RTS) (1975/1978), Bhaskar had introduced the idea of a stratified reality. Based upon a transcendental argument into the conditions of possibility for science he argues that we should think of reality as consisting of layers. This notion of layers, or levels, is developed throughout RTS, but also in later works.

The key value in thinking in terms of a stratified reality for realist social scientists has been the manner in which non-observable entities, such as social structures, are now treated as ontologically real entities, which are deemed legitimate objects of inquiry for science. The theory of 'meta-reality' has this notion of a layered structure to reality at its core (Bhaskar 2002c). Bhaskar suggests we should think in terms of three broad levels of reality; the 'demi-real', 'relative-reality' and 'meta-reality'. These three levels do not supplant, or negate, the three levels developed in RTS (the actual, the empirical, the real). However, 'meta-reality' itself has no depth and is a non-dual realm that transcends time and space.

This is best explained through a consideration of the 'demi-real' and the 'relative real', and contrasting these to the newly theorised 'meta-real'. The 'demi-real' is a world of illusion, which is nevertheless causally efficacious (Bhaskar 2002a: xxii). In many respects, the 'demi-real' is similar to traditional Marxist understandings of ideology, as false consciousness. However, the 'demi-real' is more than simply false consciousness, since it denotes a realm of human practice, institutions, and modes of being, which although existing, are non-necessary. War, for example, constitutes perhaps the primary example of the 'demi-real'. No one can deny the fact of war, yet as Bhaskar argues, as have many others, war is not essential to human existence. In our practices we create war, yet it is conceivable that we could create a world that was absent of war. The defining features of the 'demi-real' are duality, contradictions and splits and this realm dominates 'relative-reality'. 'Relative-reality' encompasses the 'demi-real', but importantly the 'demi-real' is the realm that is most apparent to the vast majority of human actors. Ethically, the 'demi-real' is the realm of hate, fear, divisiveness and alienation. One way to understand the 'demi-real' is as a realm that encompasses both the actual and the empirical of RTS. Irrealism provides the philosophical basis of this realm, since the 'demi-real' is marked by acceptance that this is simply the ways things must be.

'Relative-reality' is the totality of reality considered in RTS. It is the world of becoming and encompasses change and development. It also encompasses the 'demi-real' and the negative aspects of social life are always possibilities within 'relative-reality'. Since the 'demi-real' emerges out of 'relative-reality', and although the 'demi-real' dominates 'relative-reality', it is actually thoroughly dependent upon hidden aspects of 'relative-reality'. Within the realm of 'relative-reality' there are deep structures that produce the 'demi-real' world we observe and act in. Critical realism, as a social science and philosophy, acts as a realist corrective to the irrealism of the 'demi-real'. Insofar as critical realism

sees beyond the 'demi-real' and attempts to locate the deeper structures of 'relative-reality' it 'can indeed be an emancipatory philosophy' (Bhaskar 2002a: xxii). Indeed critical realism provides a better, perhaps even truer, more complete, account of 'relative-reality' and in its descriptions of the deep structures that govern that realm it outlines the necessary conditions for transformation of the 'demi-real'. Science is the human practice best placed to illuminate these deep structures, hence it might seem that science still has an emancipatory role to play. However, according to Bhaskar, the descriptions provided by critical realism are still grounded in duality, hence

> the liberatory potential it [critical realism] affords will always be circumscribed until its deep, essential, alethic, non-dual grounds, mode of constitution and deep interior are fully displayed, cognized and lived self-consciously in the experience of agents who are intelligent, creative, loving, right-acting, and capable of the fulfillment of their intentionality. And to describe this world in such a way that the agents not merely think being, but be being, at its deepest level, i.e. realise themselves. (Bhaskar 2002a: xxiii)

In effect, Bhaskar has added another level to reality that now encompasses and governs 'relative-reality'. And it is only in this realm that emancipation can truly be gained. But more than this, the attempt to uncover the deep structures of 'relative-reality' that has so far underpinned almost all critical realist social research might (i) always fail due to the fact that this is still the realm of duality, hence the reproduction or reemergence of the 'demi-real' is an ever present possibility; and (ii) actually be a barrier to true emancipation. As the above excerpt suggests, until the domain of meta-reality is accessed the emancipatory potential of critical realism is limited. Indeed, 'we can only make a difference if in some way we are not alienated from ourselves. What I am going to argue … is that the self-alienation of man does not exhaust, but is the root cause of all the other ills that we have' (Bhaskar 2002c: 22). This can only be taken to mean that a science not grounded in the theory of 'meta-reality' can never hope to access the 'root cause' of all human ills. Since science can never produce knowledge of the 'meta-real' it has no role to play in emancipation. Moreover, the fact that 'we can only make a difference' once we are no longer alienated from ourselves entails that self-realisation is prior to any other emancipatory project. Or to put it another way: First we need 'self-realisation', then we move to science. Moreover, since Bhaskar sees critical realism as the best philosophy of

'relative-reality' then we can presume that all of science is also in the same situation.

But what exactly is the 'meta-real'? How do we access it? How consistent is it with critical realist philosophy? And crucially, what arguments does Bhaskar provide that might persuade us to accept it and hence attempt to access it? There are supposedly three aspects to the 'meta-real'; the cosmic envelope, ground states and transcendental identification. Our 'ground states' are our essential being. The cosmic envelope is what binds all our ground states together. Transcendental identification is the process through which we achieve self-realisation. First, and foremost the 'meta-real' is a level of existence without depth. It is a world without depth because it is a non-dual space. In the domain of the 'meta-real' everything is connected through what Bhaskar calls the 'cosmic envelope' (Bhaskar 2002c: 242). The 'cosmic envelope' is what connects everything in the universe together. As Bhaskar, puts it, 'everything in the universe must have a basic state and the envelope which encompasses all these most basic states or the ground states of every being I would call the cosmic envelope' (Bhaskar 2002c: 242). The basic state of every entity he calls its 'ground state'. Every being supposedly has its own unique ground state. There is something within us, he argues, that allows us to be what we are. Hence 'we could not get angry unless we had the ground state properties within us which made anger possible' (Bhaskar 2002c: 241). However, since the level of the meta-real is a non-dual realm, there is simply no room for differences and the ground state of every being must necessarily be identical. Ultimately, and despite Bhaskar's attempt to argue otherwise, the ground state and the cosmic envelope are one and the same:

> We can say that there is something essential and ultimate in being which is also ingredient within us. This ingredient would be innermost being or our most essential nature because it would that aspect of our being upon which all other properties of our being depended … Some of these properties I want to argue will be quite surprising, we cannot do anything without creativity, love, action, spontaneous action … . How would this level of being relate to other aspects of being? Exactly the same argument, as we are part of the universe there is something essential to the universe which must be ingredient in us. That argument applies to all beings. So everything that is within our cosmic totality must have an essential ingredient within us. It would not be a universe, one universe, unless there was something which actually all these elements in the cosmic totality

> made it one universe. What is it that makes it one universe? The easiest way is to think that the universe is characterised by what I call the cosmic envelope. (Bhaskar 2002c: 242)

That the cosmic envelope and our ground states are one and the same is both a logical necessary outcome of the argument and it is abundantly clear in Bhaskar's own formulations. 'I have now developed the concepts of the ground-state and the cosmic envelope, which binds the ground-states of all beings together in the universe. This is clearly related, in some way to the idea of an ultimatum; in fact the cosmic envelope is the ultimatum, and it is an ultimate ingredient in all beings at the level of their ground states' (Bhaskar 2002a: xii). Our essential being then, our essential ground-state, is the 'cosmic envelope' (Bhaskar 2002c: xiii). Equally, although he seems to accept that anger might be a possible component of a person's ground-state, that is, existing in the realm of the meta-real, he persistently argues that the meta-real is structured only by, 'free, loving, creative intelligent energy' (Bhaskar 2002c: vii). And the 'ground state qualities of human beings consists inter alia in their energy, intelligence, creativity, love, capacity for right action' (Bhaskar 2002c: xiii). Nowhere does he consider the possibility of a person's ground state consisting of pure evil, because evil only occurs in the realm of 'relative-reality'. In fact he seems to explicitly dismiss the idea that the essential ground of any being could express a non-loving form of action, '[t]hus shooting a pistol or robbing a bank … are not in line with the dharma or ground-state qualities of the agents concerned' (Bhaskar 2002c: 5; Bhaskar, 2002a: xxxiii). Indeed, '[i]t could be said that if the theme and mode of combat of demi-reality is war, that of relative reality is struggle, whereas that of absolute reality is love and peace' (Bhaskar 2002a: xxii).

The cosmic envelope represents a fundamental limit to what is, and can be, known (Bhaskar 2002c: 242). This can be sharply contrasted with the stratified view of reality in CR (and possibly DCR). In CR, even though the sciences might discover underlying structures that explain phenomena, at no time is it suggested that science might reach the most basic level of existence. In CR the dialectic of science is open-ended, and each new discovery simply becomes the phenomena which now requires explanation. In TDCR, however, there is an absolute limit and end to both knowledge and being. Both are united and become one when we achieve emancipation through self-realisation. This seems to be an extreme instance of the epistemic fallacy; the identification of knowledge with Being. Bhaskar is explicit about this process however,

arguing that access to the 'meta-real' depends upon 'transcendental identification' (Bhaskar 2002a: xvii, 2002c: 242).

Ultimately, the cosmic envelope is pure consciousness (Bhaskar 2002c: 243). Again, this is a radical reversal of a fundamental critical realist motif. Consciousness now precedes matter (Bhaskar 2002a: 21). 'Can we therefore say that matter and consciousness are on a par? No. We have no grounds for supposing that all consciousness must presuppose matter, whereas we have grounds for supposing that all matter is implicitly or explicitly conscious' (Bhaskar 2002a: 21). When we connect, through self-realisation, with the cosmic envelope, we are instaneously connected with everything in the universe because everything being in the world is conscious (Bhaskar 2002a: xxvii).

This is the process that Bhaskar calls 'transcendental identification' and it occurs when we recognise the 'meta-real' and in particular become connected to the totality of existence through the 'cosmic envelope'. In fact, this is the only argument Bhaskar supplies to support his claim regarding the existence of such a realm. However, the argument is simplistic and simply false. For example, he argues that 'whenever you hear me you are in transcendental identification with my words'. This is a process that involves no thought, since 'if you are thinking you are not listening' (Bhaskar 2002a: 60). Similarly, 'if you are watching a play on television and are watching and absorbed by the play you are in a non-dual state' (Bhaskar 2002a: 60). More than this, however, Bhaskar argues that 'every object in the world must be capable of becoming one with me in my consciousness. I have the capacity for transcendental identification with everything that exists' (Bhaskar 2002a: 71). This quite frankly leads to absurd claims, such as '[t]he fact that all beings are enfolded within me enables me in principle to discover the alethic truth of those beings, such as the molecular structure of a crystal or the nature of gravity or what it is like to be dragon' (Bhaskar 2002a: xviii). Now, I cannot speak for Bhaskar's ability to listen without thinking, but it seems to me that listening thoughtfully is intrinsic to good communication. Indeed, whereas Bhaskar argues that when we begin to think we stop listening hence we miss what is being said, the reverse is actually the case. That is, that when we listen without thinking about the content and meaning of the words we are not really listening at all. This is most apparent when watching a complicated television plot (*24* for example); in order to follow the plot we need to link the pieces together; we need to think about what is happening and how all the pieces relate. It is also clearly apparent when listening to a speaker giving an academic talk and lectures depend upon students listening and thinking about what is being said.

Another example Bhaskar gives is of musicians playing together. When they play together they apparently do not need to listen to each other, they simply play and achieve transcendental identification with each others 'ground-state' through the cosmic envelope. But this is precisely what most musicians do not do. Playing together involves listening, thinking and anticipating the playing of others. This may all happen at a subconscious level, but the mere fact that there are temporal limitations to our understanding does not mean that it is not happening. These arguments simply fail to ontologically establish the realm of the non-dual. They are wholly unconvincing and indeed Bhaskar acknowledges that sound ontological arguments for the realm of the non-dual will not be forthcoming. Devoid of arguments of why we should embrace the realm of the non-dual Bhaskar can only point towards faith and dogmatism. I have attempted to avoid the religious and mystical tenor of Bhaskar's recent work, but as I end it is impossible not to comment. The development of TDCR is structured around an assertive and dogmatic set of propositions as opposed to concrete argument. Bhaskar may have found spiritual enlightenment, but as many philosophers before him have known, subjective experiences can have little bearing on forms of oppression that require collective action, and indeed they can often be the barrier to it. Marx did not call Religion the opium of the people without good reason. For Marx man [sic] is no abstract being squatting outside the world. Man is the world of man, state and society. As such, Man, state and society produce religion, which is an inverted consciousness of the world. Critical realists would do well not to forget this.

Conclusion

So where does this leave critical realism, science and emancipation? According to Bhaskar, '[w]e do not have to construct an alternative order, the system which is despoiling us entirely depends on what we already have. All we have to do is recognise that we already have and are this order, that the other order depends entirely on what we are; and that without us and the non-dual realm it could not survive for a moment' (Bhaskar 2002a: li–lii). As such emancipation is aligned with identification of our ground-state and connectivity to a universal consciousness within the cosmic envelope. Equally, in the new philosophy of meta-reality knowledge also undergoes a radical transformation. Knowledge is now redefined as identification (Bhaskar 2002a: 2). Knowledge is no longer something that is socially constructed with others and relates to an external or intransitive object, but rather comes from within (Bhaskar 2002a: 3).[12] As Bhaskar put it, this is a 'subjective or

internal moment' that mirrors the Platonic ideal of anamenisis (Bhaskar 2002a: 3).

This is a very different view of the relationship between knowledge and emancipation from that contained in critical realism. To become emancipated now means to become what we already are. There is no longer room for radical and collective acts aimed at social change. Or at best, these are dependent upon, and subordinate to the act of self realisation. Moreover, the concrete problems of historically located forms of oppression are now side-stepped with a definition of the 'meta-real' that is impossibly optimistic and ungrounded in any ontological arguments. The ground states of all human beings are simply assumed to be embedded in overly idealist structures of unconditional love, themselves embedded within a supposed cosmic envelope. Science has no point of access to this realm; hence the only real issue is to connect with the ultimata through self-realisation.

The self of TDCR exists outside of time and place and all we need to do is access it. This thoroughly individualist notion of political action is indeed apt to bring about a politics of inaction, despite the claims to the contrary. Critical realist social scientists can no longer sit on the fence on this issue. Allowing Bhaskar space to develop his thought in any direction he sees fit is one thing. Not to criticise that thought and its potential impact on social science is another. Identifying the barriers to emancipation is a crucial part of what drives critical realist social science. And just because some of those barriers are within realist social science does not expunge the responsibility to expose them.

3
Method, Marxism and Critical Realism

John Michael Roberts

Introduction

Marxists seek to combine ontological, epistemological and methodological insights when exploring the social world and, as is sometimes the case, the natural world (on the latter see, for example, Levins and Lewontin 1985). While Marxists recognise that all three areas are linked together, they also recognise differences between them. Marxists who explore the ontology of the world highlight those observable and unobservable exploitative social structures that mediate human behaviour in class societies. At a high level of abstraction exploitative social structures are defined primarily by a relationship in which those who own and control the means of production can extract unpaid surplus labour from those who work for owners and controllers. Marxists who explore epistemology are interested in highlighting those ideas that help to sustain, justify and legitimate particular ideas that ideologically misrepresent or distort the reality of exploitative social structures and practices. Marxists who explore questions of method wish to develop a framework that will guide an explanation and understanding of exploitative social structures and practices as well as those ideas that justify exploitative social structures and practices. A key methodological resource for Marxists, in this regard, has been that of abstraction. By isolating an object of analysis in order to investigate it – let us say, for example, the economy – Marxists have been concerned to examine the internal structure of an object. This form of abstraction has opened the way for Marxists to consider the internal exploitative social relations of an object – why and how capital, for example, exploits labour power within the economy – and how and why these exploitative social relations might go into crisis, breakdown and provide a space for groups to resist exploitative social structures.

However, the methodological insights within Marxism have often been limited in scope, being highly theoretical and providing little in the way of advice about how to conduct empirical research. It is in this respect that critical realism has been a useful ally for Marxists for two principle reasons. First, critical realists have sought to develop their insights to explore the practical and day-to-day realities of conducting social research. Second, critical realists adopt similar ontological, epistemological and methodological standpoints to that of Marxism. Indeed, many critical realists have explicitly identified themselves as working within Marxism. Where Marxists have therefore been at arguably their weakest, namely that of method, then critical realism can be said to have been useful for Marxism.

One important methodological sphere in which Marxists can learn much from critical realism has been the critique by critical realists of empiricist and positivist research methods. In particular critical realists have shown that an exclusive concern with formal and law-like methods of causality such as that represented by statistics (e.g., A causes B) are limited in scope. They are limited because they explore observable and external relationships between objects of investigation and thereby fail to fully understand the (mainly) non-observable internal structure and mechanism of an object, and how this structure and mechanism produce tendencies in the empirical world. But while this point is well taken, it has also been the case that many critical realists extend the analytical rigour of critical realism without recourse to Marx or Marxism. Perhaps this should not come as too much of a surprise, especially when we see that the founding text of critical realism, *A Realist Theory of Science*, written by Roy Bhaskar and originally published in 1975, does not mention Marx. This is somewhat curious if for no other reason than that (1) other critical realists writing during the 1970s did engage explicitly with the work of Marx and, indeed, saw an affinity between the two; and that (2) Bhaskar was to argue later on that an implicit relationship did indeed exist between critical realism and Marxism, even if he qualified this by saying that '*scientific realism* … is arrived at only gradually (by Marx), unevenly and relatively late' (Bhaskar 1989: 134). Interestingly, Bhaskar's silence about Marx in *A Realist Theory* was to show the way in later years how non-Marxist critical realists could develop a non-Marxist realist method. But this is not all one-way traffic. As I document below, some Marxists have expressed a certain degree of hostility towards the claims of critical realism. However, by not talking to one another, and by not combining what is best about each another I think that both critical realism and Marxism end up being poorer theoretical frameworks.

In this chapter I try to combine elements from both in a way that is advantageous for a radical social science method to develop. But more than this, I use critical realism as a way of developing a specifically Marxist social science method. In particular I argue that the critical realist concept of mechanism is a useful tool with which to explore the specific ideological form of social contexts. However, I also argue that to productively use the concept of mechanism as a methodological tool it is crucial to understand how mechanisms are always embedded within specific contradictory social and historical forms of life that, in turn, are embedded within wider contradictory social relations. It is this latter historical perspective that I develop through Marxism and which I have termed as the 'fourth domain' of social reality that underpins the three domains identified by critical realists (empirical, actual and the real). Thus, and more generally, I build upon the work of those Marxists who, at the same time, use critical realism to advance Marxist theory. In a nutshell, while I genuinely think that critical realism can add something to Marxism, I do not think that critical realism comprises an inherently Marxist set of ideas. My intention in this chapter is therefore to flag up some of the ways in which the two can fruitfully work together to construct a Marxist method. I begin first by briefly outlining the various relationships that exist, and have existed, between critical realism and Marxism as regards method.[1]

Critical realism and Marxism on method

As I have indicated above, some critical realists found solace in the belief that their excursions within the philosophy of science and social science, and the standpoints they advocated within the various debates on this subject matter, was also evident in the work of Marx. For example, in *Philosophical Foundations of the Three Sociologies*, Ted Benton (1977) highlights how Marxism has a stratified conception of reality in a manner compatible with critical realism. To begin, first, with Marx's stratified conception of the world, Benton (1977: 154–157) draws upon Poulantzas's methodological discussion at the beginning of his *Political Power and Social Classes* (1973) and the his threefold classification of historical materialism as a means to comprehend the stratified nature of the social world. First, historical materialism rests upon the idea that certain concepts used to explore society – mode of production, raw materials, and so on – are trans-historical in scope. This means that they can be used to organise concrete material irrespective of the specific properties of any particular society. This is the first level of the real. Second, however, particular theories exist 'whose concepts provide the

theoretical analysis of each of the "modes of production" (primitive communist, ancient, Asiatic, feudal, capitalist socialist) identified in the general theory' (Benton 1977: 154). In the capitalist mode of production, for example, 'particular concepts' would include that of labour power and surplus value. This is the second level of the real. Finally, 'regional theories' refer to structural levels, or 'regions', within each mode of production itself, for example, how labour power assumes different forms in a variety of social contexts. This is the final level of the real that Marxism should be concerned with. For this reason it is possible to say that Marxism has a stratified view of reality compatible with critical realism. And it is a stratified view of reality that is also important as regards developing an ideology-critique. For example, critical realists aim to go beyond our everyday ideas and their associated sensations of the world in order to comprehend the real world lying behind them. But critical realists, like Marx, also want to suggest that ideas can mystify, conceal and distort aspects of reality.

In many respects, therefore, it is not too difficult to detect many similarities between Marx and critical realism on the issue of method. First, Keat and Urry (1982) suggest that, ultimately, for Marx, people act towards one another and upon the external world through their labour. Through labour, specific societies are born and specific needs are met. Moreover, societies change and alter their form historically as new needs arise and new methods of production are devised to satisfy those needs. Thus the first methodological principle for Marx's realist method is to move beyond classical liberal theory in which individuals are conceptualised as in order to understand how individuals interact with others through changing social relations of production in order to satisfy changing social needs.

Second, Marx shows us that when we investigate objects of analysis it is more fruitful to explore how an object in question acquires a specific social and historical form within a particular mode of production. Keat and Urry suggest that for Marx a mode of production is defined principally through a 'central social relation within society' (Keat and Urry 1982: 98). For example, the central social relation under capitalism is that between wage-labour and capital. This central relationship creates various contradictory structures and practices within the capitalist mode of production that are then reproduced in distinct and unique social forms beyond the capitalist mode of production. And so, for example, the capitalist state obtains a particular social form under capitalism. Unlike other non-capitalist political structures, the capitalist state is a separate sphere to that of the economy and seeks, amongst other things,

to regulate society by recourse to abstract legal rules and through a concentrated coercive body in the guise of state bureaucrats and through the police and the military. The capitalist state also seeks to regulate the monetary flow of society at local, national and global levels. While these functions of the capitalist state generate specific political contradictions, these are bound up with the unique functions of the capitalist state and do not exist under any other mode of production. What is important to note about these observations is that, for Marx, method should be guided by a relational social theory that conceptualises an object of analysis (in this case the state) as *emerging* from a more abstract and simple structural relation (in this case the capital–labour relation). Emergence, on this understanding, refers to those properties and processes that are relatively autonomous of their constituent properties even if they share an internal relationship to them. Emergent mechanisms can therefore react back upon their constituent properties and alter their form (for some interesting discussions about emergence and methodology see Carter and New 2004; Danermark *et al*. 2002).

Third, Marx rejects what are seen to be 'natural' laws that are applicable to all societies. As Keat and Urry state, for Marx, in respect to economic forms of activity, 'there are no general laws of economic life which are independent of historical structures' (Keat and Urry 1982: 99). By situating method within a social and historical milieu, Marxism, like critical realism, rejects a wholly empiricist methodological approach based upon making generalisations about the social world that are then applied in a somewhat chaotic fashion to different societies. According to Sayer (1992), 'a generalisation is an approximate quantitative measure of the numbers of objects belonging to some class or a statement about certain common properties of objects' (Sayer 1992: 100). And so if variable A causes variable B then this simple causal relationship can hold irrespective of the specific social dynamics of a locality. If CCTV cameras are seen to deter crime in one locality then it follows that CCTV cameras will deter crime in other localities whether this is in London, Manchester, or Edinburgh. As such generalisations invariably explore *formal* and *observable* relationships between objects and assess quantitative relationships between variables. They thereby fail to consider the qualitatively unique social mediations of underlying contradictions and problems within a specific locality. As a result, formal empirical methods frequently construct circular arguments. So, CCTV cameras deter crime in one locality because that particular locality has CCTV cameras. This tautology elevates *part* of the explanation for deterring crime for the *main* explanation. The problem with this approach is that it makes

CCTV cameras appear as if they have a *natural* propensity to deter crime. In making such a dubious claim this approach neglects to consider other underlying factors unique to the locality in question that may, or may not, deter crime for example, the formation of criminal social networks that only exist within a particular locality.

All of which brings us to the fourth methodological point. Marx is consistently at pains to show that how the world immediately appears to us belies a deeper underlying reality. Unlike empiricist, positivist and social constructionist methodologies, Marx suggests that method should be based upon scientific foundations to the extent that method should seek to explain appearances in terms of reality. A Marxist and critical realist method must distinguish between appearance and reality if they are to gain knowledge not only about underlying real processes but also about the appearances, including ideologies, which distort particular forms of knowledge about underlying real processes.

Finally, some critical realists argue that Marx's discussion of method in works such as *Grundrisse* and *Capital* correspond quite nicely with critical realism's pursuit of what might be termed as a 'rational' or 'good' abstraction. This method of abstraction isolates the necessary and internal properties of an object, namely its generative or causal powers. Once identified the diverse but contingently combined determinations of those properties can be examined at a more concrete level. This move is particularly important because only then will we be able to establish the activation of the causal mechanism in question. In this way a precise definition of the object can be arrived at so that when a move is made back to the concrete one can gain a more accurate understanding of the object's interaction with a diverse range of elements (Sayer, 1992: 87). The more specific term that critical realists give to this method is 'retroduction'. According to critical realists, once a phenomenon is detected which requires us to identify and explain the mechanism responsible for its existence then it is necessary to build a model of the mechanism via the cognitive materials of knowledge about the phenomenon already gained. Information is collected about the mechanism which, if it was to exist, would account for the phenomenon in question (Bhaskar 1989: 19–20; Collier 1994: 22, 161, 163, 166; Sayer, 1992: 107, 158–159, 207). A three-phase scheme emerges: 'science identifies a phenomenon (or a range of phenomena), constructs explanations for it and empirically tests its explanations, leading to the identification of the generative mechanism at work, which then becomes the phenomenon to be explained; and so on' (Bhaskar 1989: 20).

But other Marxist realists, whilst acknowledging undeniable similarities between critical realism and Marxism, are also keen to highlight the

differences between both. Joseph (2002; see also his chapter), for example, argues that one of the most helpful contributions that critical realism has made towards Marxism relates to the transcendental and underlabouring rationale of critical realism. On this account, critical realism explains the necessary conditions for the production of knowledge. As a result it can also help to explain the necessary conditions for a *Marxist* theory of knowledge to emerge. This moves Joseph to say, '(i)n keeping with this underlabouring conception, it is important to distinguish between a realist philosophical approach to science and a Marxist approach to the social world' (Joseph 2002: 13). And it is this distinction, according to Joseph, that marks out an important difference between both. Critical realism can provide some philosophical guidance about the usefulness of the concepts for social explanation that Marxism develops. But when critical realism attempts to surpass or replace these concepts with its own concepts for social explanation, then critical realism surpasses its own self-imposed underlabourer role and becomes instead a theoretical rival to Marxism.

As regards methodology, therefore, Marxism has a great deal to learn from critical realism, especially in respect to its critique of empiricist methodology. In the words of Pearce and Woodiwiss (2001), Marxists ought to follow critical realist methodological insights by insisting that

> observation should be theory-driven; causal-modelling and testing are a better way of articulating theory and data than hypothesis testing for generalisations; and results are always ultimately fallible rather than ever definitively explaining even part of what empiricists term the 'variance'. (Pearce and Woodiwiss 2001: 52)[2]

But while some Marxists have either welcomed critical realism, or at least given critical realism a cautious embrace, it is equally true to say that other Marxists reject the fundamental theoretical assumptions of critical realism. And nowhere is this more noticeable than along the lines of method. The crucial issue at stake in this respect is the extent to which we can *abstract* aspects of the world and study them in a manner that takes account of the object's relationship to other objects. For example, if we abstract the capitalist state for investigation, to what extent must we also analyse how the state interacts with other objects, such as the capitalist economy? More to the point, how do we abstract objects for investigation in such a way that we manage to see how the object in question obtains a distinct identity within a wider set of social relations, such as capitalist social relations?

It has already been indicated that for Marxists an important moment of the method of abstraction is to take account of how objects within a particular set of social and, more importantly, historical, relations change as they interact with one another. This is because Marxists place a strong emphasis upon how a set of social relations at a specific historical moment comprise a number of determining, necessary and essential contradictions that are reproduced into specific contradictions within the distinctive ideological parameters of other objects. Thus objects are analysed as social forms of wider, more determining, social and historical relations. As we have already seen, Marxists argue that capitalist mode of production is determined by a set of necessary contradictions associated with the capital–labour relationship (e.g., the contradictions between use-value and value, fixed and circulating capital, constant capital and variable capital, the overaccumulation of capital and so on). It is because of the form that these specific contradictions assume that push objects to develop into new social forms in order to overcome contradictions. As part of this process contradictions are reproduced outside of the capitalist *mode of production* in qualitatively distinct ways into other 'non-economic' *social relations* like the capitalist state or the capitalist public sphere. The reproduction of contradictions from the mode of production to wider social relations, and then vice versa, creates and develops a specific contradictory historical *system*. For Marxists, therefore, only by comprehending how objects are part of a wider contradictory historical system can we begin understand how objects gain a distinctive identity through interaction and change with other objects. As Ollman (2001) says in this regard

> Hence, capital (or labour, money, etc.) is not only how capital appears and functions, but also how it develops. Its real history is also part of what it is. But history for Marx refers not only to time past but to time future. So that whatever something is becoming – whether we know what that will be or not – is in some important respect part of what it is, along with what it once was. (Ollman 2001: 288; see also Gunn 1989)

From a methodological point of view this standpoint suggests that we need to abstract an object in a *systematic* manner, that is, abstract within the evolving, necessary and logical contradictions of a particular historical system. More precisely, we need to 'to search for the most *abstract* and *simple* category' associated with a particular system that is, in turn, related

to its most *abstract* and *simple* determining essence (see Brown *et al*. 2002). Only once we have isolated both can we then see how each is reproduced into more concrete, complex and contradictory forms of existence.

Now, while it is the case that *some* critical realists also highlight the necessity to abstract objects of analysis in this systematic and dialectical manner, many other critical realists object to what they consider to be inherent limitations of the Marxist method of abstraction. Patomäki (2003) for example notes that, in respect to economics, Marxists have been far too concerned with the labour theory of value and transformation problem (the transformation of values into prices). In addition Patomäki (2003) suggests that many of the conditions for critical realism did not exist when Marx was writing. Subsequently, Marx did not have a necessarily mature enough grasp of theoretical categories associated with social structures, relations and laws. For reasons such as these, some critical realists have recently devoted a considerable amount of time to developing a specifically critical realist social science method rather than one based within Marxism. For example, Sayer (1992) follows Bhaskar's division of the world into three domains. First, there is the empirical domain of how the world appears to us. Second, there is the actual domain, which relates to how objects interact with one another so as to produce distinctive effects. Finally, there is the real domain. This, as we have seen, relates to the structure of an object. The structure of each object will have distinctive mechanisms that will produce events under particular conditions. In other words, there is no inherent necessity why mechanisms will be activated. Rather, mechanisms are activated within contingent circumstances depending upon how it interacts with other objects. While natural scientists may very well be able to activate mechanisms in closed scientific conditions, in social conditions the world is too unpredictable to conduct these types of experiments because it is inhabited by, amongst other things, unpredictable human behaviour. Therefore it is only possible to explore social and human interaction within open conditions of activity that is, under everyday conditions of existence.

Sayer extends these critical realist insights into a more coherent realist social science methodology. He suggests that while it is indeed useful to start one's exploration of an object from the statistical regularities it may share with another object, to stop at this moment would constitute a 'chaotic abstraction' that only examines how different objects are related together to produce particular events. This *extensive* research method will repeatedly observe the interaction between discrete objects

and will produce significant results that can be generalised across the relevant objects. For example, '(o)ne identifies a population and defined groups *taxonomically*, on the basis of shared attributes (for example, white women over 60; houses worth less than £50,000), and seeks quantitative relations among the variables' (Sayer, 2000: 20). While some useful statistical information might be obtained by following this method, it tends to neglect deeper causal processes that have a significant impact upon an object of analysis. But in order to think about these causal processes we must, first, abstract the causal powers and mechanisms of an object under investigation and think *conceptually* about how they operate. This methodological procedure involves an *intensive* research methodology, which 'is primarily concerned with what makes things happen in specific cases, or in more ethnographic form, what kind of universe of meaning exists in a particular situation' (Sayer, 2000: 20). In other words, an intensive account would try to understand and explain the social relations and their causal relationships that mediate the interaction between two objects (Carter and New 2004: 8). Thus, if we were to evaluate a particular policy programme, such as CCTV cameras as a means to deter crime, we would have to look not at the programme as such but rather at the underlying reasons and resources that are offered up to subjects to make changes. Why change might occur (e.g., criminals will be deterred by CCTV cameras) will depend upon the circumstances of the subjects being affected and the nature of the social policy programme on offer.

If this is the case then we would be interested in exploring a particular context (C) in which programme mechanisms (M) – a theory about the resources on hand for people and the choices they have to act upon them – might produce a desired outcome (O). Taken together we get the combination of CMO (Pawson and Tilly 1997). On this understanding mechanisms refer to recurrent social processes, a sequence of 'causally linked events that occur repeatedly in reality if certain conditions are given' (Mayntz 2004: 241; see also Elster 1998; Hedström and Swedberg 1996; Wight 2004). What this methodological procedure therefore highlights is a sensitivity towards the contexts in which mechanisms are put to work (a particular high-crime locality where CCTV are placed) so that we can examine the actual outcome that is produced (e.g., whether or not criminals were indeed deterred because of CCTV cameras). If we do not get the desired result – for example, crime reduction – then we would have to introduce new mechanisms until the result was reached. We may in fact find that a combination of mechanisms worked in one locality, while a different combination worked in another. This should

be expected in realist research because we are not looking to whether programmes 'work' as such, but whether which 'family of mechanisms' work best in which circumstances (Pawson and Tilly 1997; Pawson 2002a, 2002b). Again, the key in understanding this realist method is to note that real social relations and their associative causal powers are the object for empirical enquiry, and not merely hypotheses or statistical regularities. There is thus a practical dimension to social research as researchers continually refine their results by gaining more information about the causal interaction of different objects in different circumstances (see Danermark *et al*. 2002). For all these reasons May (2004: 183) suggests that a reflexive realist research practice entails 'an understanding of the social conditions of social scientific knowledge production and its relation to knowledge reception and context and thus its capacity for action' (see also Cruickshank 2003).

While this research-focused tendency of critical realism has provided an astute awareness of the problems of empiricist and positivist social science research methods, there is nevertheless a propensity on its part to ignore the more Marxist-inspired elements to critical realism. Indeed, in most recent debates around empirical research methods by critical realists Marxism is never comprehensively explored nor commented upon. From a Marxist standpoint, therefore, a serious problem for radical social science method emerges by this omission. Many critical realists today develop method for the sake of method thus ensuring that method becomes a transcendental. As Fine (2004) has observed, critical realists tend to deploy a number of methodological assumptions associated with the likes of for example, structure-agency, that are so transhistorical in scope as to be inadequate at a practical level to investigate the historical specificity of the capitalist mode of production. Thus the critical realist method of abstraction, namely retroduction, does not begin by seeking to analyse the movement and development of a historical system, along with the development of a system's more concrete forms of existence. In other words, there is no inherent reason why critical realists should retroduce mechanisms within their *systematic objective and historical preconditions* of existence. The fact that some critical realists *might* retroduce within the objective and historical preconditions of, say, capitalism, says more about the Marxist inclinations of the critical realist in question rather than critical realism as a method per se. The problem is plain to see. In the hands of some contemporary critical realists there is no *necessity* to retroduce further causal determinations of an object as these are socially and historically mediated through a historical system like capitalism. In other words, some contemporary

critical realists develop concepts that do not inhere within one another. And so, for example, we do not have any ground to say that the commodity within capitalism inheres within capital. The tendencies of a causal mechanism become self-ascribed, non-historical, and are seen to evolve in a non-contradictory and linear manner (see Arthur 1997). Effectively, therefore, methodological principles are composed of a limited number of procedures, such as the CMO formulation, and these principles remain unchanged even though the historical specificity of social contexts are historically and ideologically unique and constantly undergo change and transformation. Indeed, an exclusive critical realist methodology encourages this sort of procedure because social contexts are seen to operate within the contingent conditions of 'open systems' and are thus seen as comprising chance episodes through the non-necessary interaction of a number of causal mechanisms. Taking all of this on board we must conclude that in the hands of some critical realists the attempt by earlier theorists to use critical realism in order to strengthen Marxist theory comes to a halt. In the reminder of the chapter I try to show why this need not be the case. I suggest that there is a fourth domain of reality to the three outlined by critical realists – that of the 'historical' domain. I use this starting point to develop existing links between Marxism and critical realism in order to show how a Marxist methodology can be produced that fruitfully uses some of the insights from critical realism.

Method of abstraction and the fourth domain of critical realism

We have seen that, for Marx, to abstract an object adequately is also to abstract it within a wider historical form of existence in order to comprehend how the object in question internalises or 'refracts' in its own way the determinations of a historical system like capitalism (see also Roberts 2001a, 2003). Marx puts the point more plainly when he discusses the example of how we might begin to understand consciousness and ideas, which in this instance he terms as 'spiritual production'.

> In order to understand the connection between spiritual production and material production it is above all necessary to grasp the latter itself not as a general category but in *definite historical* form. … If material production itself is not conceived in its *specific historical* form, it is impossible to understand what is specific in the spiritual production corresponding to it and the reciprocal influence of one on the another. (Marx 1969: 285)

It is for this reason that Marx, along with Engels, announces in *The German Ideology* that outside of a mode of production other social forms of life (e.g., law, the state, and religion) have no independent existence (Marx and Engels 1994: 42). Indeed these more concrete and everyday objects are forms of appearance of historically specific material, productive relations (Sayer, D. 1991: 91; see also Bakhtin and Medvedev 1978). Or again in *Capital*, vol. 1, Marx says that there are no general laws as such, but 'on the contrary … every historical period possesses its own laws' (Marx 1988: 100–101; see also the discussion in Mattick, Jr. 1991). Understanding what Marx is saying in these quotes is crucial for understanding methodological issues and problems surrounding critical realism.

To begin an explanation of what Marx is saying it is necessary first to briefly recall the critical realist stratified view of the world into the three domains of the empirical, actual and real, as depicted in Figure 3.1.

As we can see from Figure 3.1 there is no mention of what might be termed as the 'historical domain'. But before we go further with this point let us be clear what is being said here. Undeniably critical realists do, indeed, stress the need to abstract objects within specific historical social relations. Sayer (1992), for example, suggests that

> (E)ven in understanding our own contemporary society we must be aware of what is or isn't historically specific. Labour is a genuinely transhistorical necessary condition of human existence, but as such it cannot be treated as sufficient to explain concrete work-related practices in particular societies, such as the need to find a job in capitalism. (Sayer, 1992: 100–101)

Bhaskar (1998: 37) similarly observes that any robust account of social structures must seek to understand not only how they are reproduced, but also how they change and are transformed through intentional and

	Domain of real	Domain of actual	Domain of empirical
Mechanisms	√		
Events	√	√	
Experiences	√	√	√

Figure 3.1 The critical realist stratified conception of reality
Source: Taken from Bhaskar (1975: 13).

unintentional human action in space and through time. With both Sayer and Bhaskar there is thus an obvious emphasis upon the need to abstract objects within history. But what do we mean by history in this respect? Certainly we should attempt to abstract objects within their historical boundaries, but knowing this does not necessarily lead to an explanation about how we should conceptualise history. For example, many sociologists and social theorists utilise the concept of 'modernity' through which to make sense about the world around us. Stated in its simplest, modernity is equated with being a 'modern' society and such societies are usually said to comprise social entities like a modern market economy based upon the exchange of commodities, a separate bureaucratic nation state and political structure, an individualist, rational and scientific ideology, and so on. In principle each social entity could be abstracted in the manner argued for by critical realists in order to explore their causal powers and internal social structure. But this is a somewhat problematic view of historical specificity for the following reasons.

The first thing to say is that within the methodological remit of critical realism it is plausible to adopt a 'multi-causal' theory of history in the sense that a number of complementary structures and different agents are seen to move history forward. As we have seen, it is possible to identify the abstract starting points of the economy, state, ideology and so on. Each one of these starting points contains its own causal powers which cannot be reduced to the other. It is only when we retroduce further levels of concrete determinations from each starting point that we can begin to grasp how they interact with one another (Jones 1997: 847). It is maintained that the advantage of adopting this perspective is to go beyond the confinement of history to one overriding structural imperative, such as that contained in the 'economic structure'. In the words of one realist historical theorist

> There is no constant, universal, overriding economic imperative. There are numerous examples of individual and mass psychological, cultural, and ideological motives overriding economic considerations, even in modern, supposedly rationalistic, capitalist society. (Lloyd 1993: 186)

Obviously, it all depends upon how one defines the 'economic' and how economic considerations are related to other social forms of life. In the case of Lloyd, he theorises about the relationship between economics and other social forms as one mediated through 'sociological economics'.

According to Lloyd, sociological economics defines the economic realm 'as part of the social structure and so is characterized by the same kinds of institutions, organizations, social relations, social interactions, and historical processes as the wider society' (Lloyd 1993: 61). Under this definition the economic realm is considered to be 'an economic substructure or subsystem that is orientated towards certain kinds of material production' (Lloyd 1993: 61). Lloyd places Marx within a sociological economics perspective. But, for reasons already given and for reasons that will be given, it is extremely dubious to place Marx within this theoretical perspective. Indeed, Marx went out of his way to critique such a trans-historical economic perspective, as his three volume *Theories of Surplus Value* testify. More to the point such a perspective, by defining the economic realm as one realm amongst others, implies, in theory at least, that each social structure can carry the same explanatory weight as each other social structure. It is therefore difficult to analyse, and assess, the determining structure that at a high level of abstraction gives a historical system a specific ideological form.

A multi-causal approach to history therefore tends to analyse historical structures as being separate from one another. Economic structures exist beside political structures, cultural structures, ideological structures, and so on. Again in contrast to this approach a Marxist approach argues that other 'structures' are internally related social forms of a determining set of contradictions within a set of historical social relations. Certainly critical realists also talk about social relations. But they do so by looking at a diverse range of separate social relations that range from for example, family relationships to economic relations, to political relations, to educational relations, to cultural relations, and so on. In other words, social relations are not related to the social mediation and social determinations of a mode of production so that they are investigated as part of a specific historical system. Rather, social relations for critical realists frequently refer to the distribution of social power between social structures and agency at a more concrete level of abstraction.

By failing to isolate the determining 'essence' of a historical system, a multi-causal approach often misconstrues the ideological form of a historical system. Lloyd's description of the economic realm, for example, is based upon those technical materials that are prevalent throughout history. As a result it fails to specify exactly what is unique about exchange and consumption under capitalist social relations. Relations of production are grasped as property relations characterised by ownership of factors. To this extent, relations of production are seen primarily

as relations of distribution in which individuals are assigned to particular roles within the means of production. Wrongly, relations of production are thus defined as legal obligations ensuring, in turn, that they are seen to be a *political* relation instead of a *social* relation (Clarke 1980: 48–54). More to the point, Lloyd's description portrays capitalism as having 'only one, essentially capitalist, mode of economic activity, which may be present or absent in varying degrees' (Wood 1995: 175). This is in stark contrast with the Marxist idea that capitalism has a specific developmental contradictory logic that can assume many different forms in different contexts. Marxism does not suggest that the 'structure' of capitalism must assume particular technical characteristics in every society that calls itself 'capitalist'. Rather, Marxism suggests that there is no single ideal-typical capitalist formation with an assortment of technical characteristics, but rather there exist a number of ideologically specific social relations that can survive and breed in many different social formations.

To subsequently argue that the world is in fact stratified into just three domains, with 'history' defined within the remit of these three domains, often leads to the sort of speculative theorising that Marx critiqued Hegel and neo-Hegelians for engaging in. Under speculative theorising it is feasible to construct a set of concepts that organise reality for investigation rather than reality helping to construct a set of specific concepts that then help us understand the peculiarity of historical forms of existence. Thus, for some critical realists, the concept of 'reality' would seem to refer ultimately to a 'conceptual reality' in which the important elements of reality that require investigation (causal powers, structures, mechanisms, and so on) are already defined in an a priori manner before we investigate their historical form. For Marx, the really important methodological question is somewhat opposite to this procedure. We need to know how the 'real' is in fact a refracted social form of more determining historical relations. This is to understand, for example, how a particular mechanism internalises and reproduces more abstract and simple determining contradictions of a historical system in its own unique way that may momentarily prove functional to the reproduction of the determining contradictions in question or may provide new crisis-tendencies for them. How, for example, are the various mechanisms associated with claims of citizenship related to the abstract determinations of capitalism? (For a more detailed discussion of this question see Dean 2003.) It is these determining relations that in the first instance mediate and bestow a specific ideological and social form upon causal mechanisms, and how we think about mechanisms, not the other way

	Domain of historical	Domain of real	Domain of actual	Domain of empirical
Refracted				
Social form	√			
Mechanisms	√	√		
Events	√	√	√	
Experiences	√	√	√	√

Figure 3.2 A Marxist-realist conception of the stratified view of reality

round. If this is the case then it would be more in keeping with Marx's realist perspective to have a four-domain stratification of reality, depicted along the following lines in Figure 3.2.

To explain Figure 3.2 in a little more detail consider the following quote from *Capital* vol. 3. Here Marx observes

> (T)he specific economic form, in which unpaid surplus-labour is pumped out of direct producers, determines the relationship of rulers to ruled, as it grows out of production itself and, in turn, reacts upon it as a determining element. Upon this, however, is founded the entire formation of the economic community which grows out of the production relations themselves, thereby simultaneously its specific political form. (Marx 1966: 791)

If we break this quote down into its different parts what we can see is that the 'economic form', which comprises the rulers and ruled (e.g., labour and capital), leads to a constant, and we could add, necessary, antagonism between both. This in turn creates an internal contradiction within the mode of production based upon the 'pumping out of unpaid surplus labour' by the rulers from the ruled. As a result there exists contradictory interests between rulers and ruled. This contradictory 'economic form' reacts back upon production and determines it, which in turn reacts upon other social forms of life (e.g., the state, religion, education, art, the public sphere) and vice versa. Thus 'non-economic' social forms of life are not only historically specific they are also contradictory. Albeit they are contradictory social forms in their own unique manner, thus ensuring that they do not merely 'reflect' the determinations of a mode of production but also 'refract' those determinations. Contradiction is thus a key moment for a Marxist method of abstraction. In saying this,

I would not want Figure 3.2 to be read as implying that a 'historical domain' is separate to that of the other three domains. Just as the empirical and actual domains are theorised by critical realists as being integrally related to the real domain, so would I want to say that the historical domain is integrally related to the other three domains. My reason for highlighting the historical domain is to suggest that causal mechanisms are mediated through particular dialectical historical processes. In other words, by bringing the historical domain into focus I am trying to make the links between critical realism and Marxism more explicit. Thus Figure 3.3 represents these historical processes within the capitalist system.

The methodological importance of this more dialectical exploration can again be grasped from *Capital*, vol. 1., where Marx writes

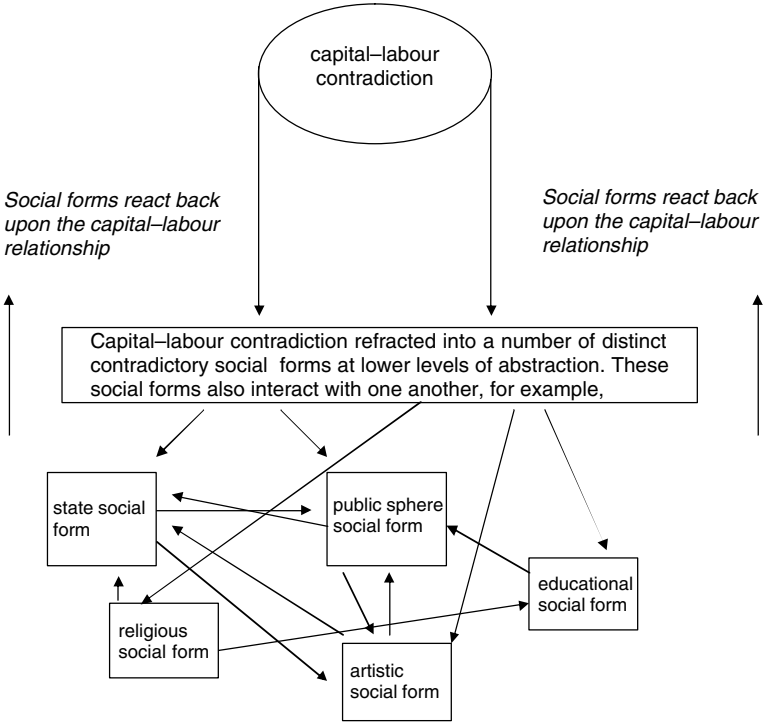

Figure 3.3 The dialectical relationship between the capitalist mode of production and social forms

> Of course the method of presentation must differ in form from that of inquiry. The latter has to appropriate the material in detail, to analyse its different forms of development and to track down their inner connection. Only after this work has been done can the real movement be appropriately presented. If it is done successfully, if the life of the subject matter is now reflected back in the ideas, then it may appear as if we have before us an *a priori* construction. (Marx 1988: 102)

Johnson (1982: 156–164) usefully outlines the methodological significance of Marx's observations in this quote through several related points (but see also the useful discussions in Albritton and Simoulidis 2004; Elson 1980; Moseley 1993; Ollman 1993; Reuten and Williams 1989; Williams 1988). First, Marx clearly distinguishes between how we begin to make initial inquiries about an object of analysis from how we present our results. This can be seen when Marx suggests that inquiry must first 'appropriate the material in detail' about a particular object. This refers to the empirical moment of research when we collect as much data as possible about a particular object of analysis. However, the collection of 'hard facts' is not our only concern here. As a student of, amongst other things, philosophy, Marx was also acutely aware that this stage of methodological labour was informed by a theoretical moment of research, in which 'hard facts' are mediated through theoretical contemplation.

Through the dialectical synthesis of data collection and theoretical reflection we arrive at the second point, namely 'to analyse … different forms of development'. Johnson argues that this next methodological step starts to place data collection within its wider historical system of existence. Theory is also a crucial moment here for without the guidance of theory it would be impossible to properly comprehend how data relates to the movement of different forms of a particular historical system. This methodological moment thereby highlights the point that historical systems do not take a unified one-dimensional path of development, but, rather, assume many complex social forms. The aim is thus to abstract an object *within* the changing nature of a historical system so that we are in a better position to see how the object itself has the capacity to change its form. While we are obviously interested with the object itself as it immediately appears within a historical system, we are also interested in how such an appearance might be contradicted by other internal mechanisms associated with an object and associated with other objects. Through these complex and contradictory processes

we can begin to unpack the specific determinations of an object as these determinations work themselves out within a wider historical system.

It is at this point that we move to the next stage of systematic abstraction, and it is one that aims to 'track down (the) inner connection' of refracted social forms as this is linked to the reproduction of the contradictory determinations of a mode of production. As Marx reminds us in *Capital*: 'What I have to examine in this work is the capitalist mode of production, and the relations of production and forms of intercourse that correspond to it' (Marx 1988: 90). Abstraction, in this sense, thereby postulates a contradictory starting point which, while *immediate*, contains within itself *mediated* forms of further development as this relates to a specific mode of production. For example, it is only under capitalist social relations that money appears as a dominant abstract commodity that is used as a general equivalent with which to exchange other commodities. In saying this, money under capitalism also has an internal contradictory form as a means of exchange and as a means of hoarding. This, in turn, produces a contradiction because if money is taken out of circulation through hoarding then commodities cannot circulate. But we should expect as much because the money-form under capitalism presupposes more abstract and simple contradictions associated with commodity production. According to Marx, the commodity under capitalism expresses both a use-value and value for itself and a use-value and value for another commodity. This *internal* and *necessary* contradiction between use-value and value appears as an external relationship between two different commodities. Marx goes on to demonstrate how the internal contradiction between use-value and value unfolds into money (the appearance of value) and the commodity (the appearance of use-value). Money now appears as a general equivalence for the exchange of other commodities and so appears as the main beneficiary of the abstract value dimension of exchange, while a commodity simply appears as a material 'thing'. At each stage of the logical derivation of this basic contradiction the constituting power of capitalism, namely labour, is increasingly mystified because the commodity is seen to be the mainstay of capitalism (see Clarke 1991; Postone 1993).

It is for these reasons that Marx calls the commodity the 'cell-form' of capitalism because it is the most abstract and simple contradiction of capitalist social relations (see Marx 1988: 125 ff.). Importantly the cell-form metaphor not only demonstrates how an object is integrally related to a historical system, it also demonstrates that the category of contradiction 'offers the optimal means of bringing such change and interaction as regards both present and future into a single focus'

(Ollman 1993: 16). This point is important because many other methods of abstraction such as some elements of critical realism stress the interconnection of objects but often at the expense of demonstrating how this interconnection develops and changes (Roberts 2001a). Contradiction, as defined here, supplies this missing aspect and offers a way to comprehend how mechanism, context and outcome are mediated through those contradictory social and historical forms in which they exist. Figure 3.4 expresses this relationship. Here we see that a mechanism, as a recurring process that links together context and outcome through a number of causal events, is mediated through contradictory social forms. Immediately, therefore, we are alerted to the point that a social context and mechanism are themselves contradictory. We should not be surprised, therefore, to discover one or more contradictions in the outcome of a mechanism. As I suggest in more detail below, this reorientation in focus about the status of a mechanism prompts us to look not only at mechanistic regularities, but also at the crisis-tendencies of mechanisms as specific contradictions assert themselves.

The next stage of systematic abstraction is 'presenting the real movement' of the object in question. It is with this stage that we would be concerned with showing how an object really develops and changes its form of existence. To adequately present the contradictory movement and development of an object also implies that we need to go beyond how an object immediately appears to us. In other words, we need to go beyond the ideological manifestation of an object, how particular appearances might justify an exploitative reality or set of power relations, and how an object might develop beyond ideological appearances and become a movement for struggle against exploitation and power. By 'presenting the real movement' we have a base through which to 'validate' our methodological critique of ideological forms. And 'validation', in which 'the life of the subject matter (is) reflected back in

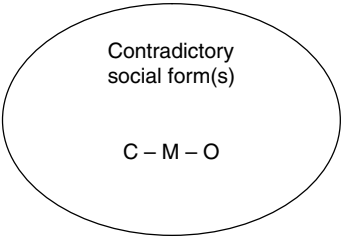

Figure 3.4 The social mediation of context, mechanism and outcome

ideas', is the final stage of systematic abstraction. But to add some flesh to these methodological bones I now outline in more detail some other methodological elements to what has been discussed so far.

Social forms: structure, agency, strategy

Systematic abstraction usefully draws our attention to the necessary and internal contradictions of an object of analysis, and provides the basis to investigate the historical mechanisms of the object in question. In saying this we must not think that there is a pre-ordained development of a specific object. For example, each social form is a relatively autonomous unit of social life, reproduces its own contradictions in its own specific way, and interacts with social forms through 'historically specific *arrangements* and combinations' (Johnson 1982: 183) that are more often than not contingent to particular countries, localities and times. Of particular importance in this regard is the question of time. Systematic abstraction is primarily concerned with the logical interconnections and development of a system within a particular point in time (Reuten 2000: 151). Problematically, therefore, systematic abstraction fails to fully understand how an object changes its form and content *between* social relations (e.g., the transition from feudalism to capitalism) as well as *within* social relations (e.g., the transition from Fordism to post-Fordism within capitalism). Thus we need to be aware exactly how the changing nature of a systematic contradiction is transformed, mediated and overdetermined by a number of contingent social forms between historical periods and within historical transitions (cf. Ollman 1993: 32).

It is in this sense that form analysis comes to the forefront of methodological reflection because social forms can be said to mediate everyday social consciousness within determinate forces and relations of production. The specific ways in which people experience their daily lives is through interacting refracted social forms, whether these be educational social forms, political social forms, artistic social forms, and so on, and it is these social forms that imprint wider social, or class, relations and processes upon people in distinctive ways. These are class relations to the extent that they are determined by the relationship between forces and relations of production along with the mode of surplus appropriation this entails. And these are class processes to the extent that they refract the contradictions, and thereby movement, between forces and relations of production, but obviously do so in their own unique manner. Thus mediated everyday experiences through social forms is a class

experience, but exactly because experience is mediated through unique and specific social forms, it is not necessarily connected to class awareness nor to class consciousness. But there is another related point to make in this respect. Although not consciously directed at class interests, some of these struggles will nevertheless be *class relevant* struggles. Such struggles are class relevant if they have an impact upon dominant class interests within a social form either directly or indirectly (see Jessop 2002). The relationship between these elements is one of *becoming*, in which systematic contradictions become experienced and mediated through the ever-changing movement, flow and forms of modes of production in lived, everyday time (see Thompson 1968; Wood 1995).

A useful way of understanding social forms is to employ the terms 'molar' and 'molecular' as used by Deleuze and Guattari. According to Deleuze and Guattari (1988), molar formations are those that are associated with 'abstract machines'. While capitalism is an obvious example of an abstract machine Deleuze and Guattari also characterise molar formations as any form that assumes recognisable functions and 'organs' with which to operate (Deleuze and Guattari 1988: 304). We see such molar forms everyday of our lives, whether these are particular 'personal' identities associated with 'woman', 'child', 'asian', 'working class', 'gay', or whether these are 'the state', 'religion', 'art', and so on. We could say that each should be looked at as a particular form of an abstract machine to the extent that each has a recognisable identity that does not exist in other historical systems. That is to say, each molar formation represents a uniform identity in a specific time and place that operates through relatively unified technologies and rationalities that can lend themselves to statistical exploration if need be. Theories, or 'rationalities', around 'race' and 'ethnicity' have been constructed within capitalist systems (think of Nazi Germany), for example, that lead to 'information' being collected through statistical 'technologies' about 'Jewish' identities (Deleuze and Guattari 1984: 315–316).

Molecular forms, on the other hand, refer to the individual *expressive* elements or parts that when together help to maintain a consistent identity and intensity for an actually existing molar formation. One molar formation, such as a particular political apparatus, may retain a consistent identity but will nevertheless be composed of different molecular elements (see Deleuze and Guattari 1988: 51). Molecules are *expressive* to the extent that molecular elements each individually communicate a moment of a molar formation becoming its identity through, we might add, contradictions. Molecular elements individually express aspects of a molar formation struggling with its own identity, struggling to

retain an ideological consistency. Thus

> Starting from the forms one has, the subject one is, the organs one has, or the functions one fulfills, becoming is to extract particles (or molecules – JMR) between which one establishes the relations of movement and rest, speed and slowness that are *closet* to what one is becoming, and through which one becomes. (Deleuze and Guattari 1988: 300)

Molecular elements are therefore overdetermined by a multiplicity of forces that exist to the extent that they constantly shift and change their identities in relation to other forces. The boundaries between these different molecular elements are fluid insofar that their power to act in the world is dependent upon other expressive molecular elements. For example, debate and discussion about a particular social policy is not merely about constructing self-enclosed 'rational' molar arguments that either aim to convince or dissuade against the implementation of the policy in question. Debate and discussion about a social policy between two people is also based around 'affectual' molecular devices such as intonation and speech performances that associate different themes of another person's argument within one's own so as to bring about an emotional impact to persuade the other of the aptness of one's argument. It is the themes of the argument themselves that are transformed so as to produce a novel emotional response, rather than simply bringing together a number of themes as is the case of a 'molar argument'.

Two points can be made here. First, a social form can be explored as a molar formation made up of molecular elements. Or, in more dialectical language, a molar formation is a refracted contradictory unity made up of opposing molecular elements. These contradictions can be regulated through particular rationalities (e.g., theories about certain identities) and technologies (e.g., statistical information) (see also Rose 1999). Second, generative mechanisms arise out of the contradictions and struggles between a molar formation and its molecular elements. A particular ideological project can aim to conceal contradictions within a molar formation in the interests of a dominant group. This can be achieved by gaining hegemony by linking together molecular elements so as to produce generative mechanisms that stabilise contradictions through expressive devices that appeal to some social groups while coercing others. The relationship between a molar formation, molecular elements and generative mechanisms helps to constitute and to stabilise the contradictions within refracted social forms.

What this discussion suggests is that we should not expect a social form to enjoy an inherent unity. Instead, what we should focus upon is

the *achievement* and *construction* of unity through an ensemble of molar and molecular powers. In relation to the state, for example, political unity is achieved through the strategic relationship between molar and molecular forces. Even though Poulantzas was rightly critical of some of the ideas put forward by Deleuze and Guattari, his following description of the capitalist state is useful in highlighting these relationships of forces. He suggests

> In locating the State as the material condensation of a relationship of forces, we must grasp it as a *strategic field and process* of intersecting power networks, which both articulate and exhibit mutual contradictions and displacements. (Poulantzas 2000: 136)

In terms of molar structures we can say that the capitalist state is composed of different expressive molecules of dominant interests. For example, different expressive interests of the bourgeoisie are represented in the state in the form of financial capitalists, industrial capitalists, commercial capitalists, and so on. One expressive interest may become hegemonic in the sense that its interests become the dominant interests of and for the policies pursued by a particular state form. The hegemony of a molecular element can also become dominant *indirectly* through a specific expressive political project that acts on behalf of the element in question. Margaret Thatcher's pursuit of the interests of financial capital through the British state in the 1980s is a case point. But the modern state is also a bureaucratic entity composed of a relational matrix between different molecular elements within its structures. For example, the state is composed of different bureaucratic departments who each have their own aims, goals and agendas. Each department enters into a debate with other departments about how best to regulate different social and public spaces. But such debate is constrained by the hegemonic dominance of particular molecular elements of the state (for a useful discussion of the state see Jessop 2002; van der Pijl 1998; Poulantzas 1973, 2000). The main point to make here is that a state fraction aiming for hegemony must strategically select other molecular elements it wishes to forge alliances with, and with which molecular interests, often geographical in scope, in civil society it also wishes to forge alliances.

But if 'society' is composed by a complex interaction between different contradictory and strategic social forms then it follows that elements within 'society' are always liable to breakdown and/or experience crisis-tendencies within or between distinctive historical periods. Through crises, class experiences often begin to be shaped by class

consciousness, or least by an awareness of distinctive modes of governing social behaviour that may serve the interests of more powerful social groups in society. The important methodological question to ask in this respect is therefore – how does a particular social form achieve some type of regulation and stability so that crisis-tendencies are momentarily suspended within or between historical periods? In other words, how is a social form given a temporary sense of coherence within time and space? Once we pose this question a number of sub-themes arise. If a social form does internalise contradictory social relations, which structural configurations and mechanisms within a social form are selected in order bring momentary stability and regulation to the social form in question and, perhaps by default, stability to other interconnected social forms? How and why are these structural configurations and mechanisms selected as a means to regulate a social form? Who gains and who loses from this process of 'structural selectivity'? For example, does a particular social group gain hegemony within the social form in question during a moment of crisis? What strategic practices are introduced in order to maintain the power of a particular social group at the expense of another group? What ideology is present?

The idea that there is no inherent unity to a refracted social form such as the state is also a crucial element in developing a Marxist realist methodology and in overcoming some misinterpretations about what such a method might entail. The first point to make in this regard is that a social form analysis goes beyond the structure-agency approach that is usually associated with critical realism, namely the transformational model of social activity (TMSA). As previous chapters in the book have indicated, the TMSA revolves around the claim that society is both the condition and outcome of human praxis, while praxis is the (conscious) production and (unconscious) reproduction of society (Bhaskar 1989: 92). By adopting the TMSA, so critical realists argue, we can gain adequate knowledge of the 'motivated productions' of society along with the 'unmotivated conditions' necessary for these productions. In line with his 'limits to naturalism', however, Bhaskar strongly urges us to follow an 'epistemological relativism' – objects and structures can only be known under particular definitions (Bhaskar 1975: 249). Knowledge is therefore a practical experience which *presupposes* an ontologically structured world (see also Outhwaite 1987: 36–44). As Archer (1995) has suggested, Bhaskar's development of the TMSA goes some way in overcoming a common problem in structure-agency debates, and one prevalent in the work of Anthony Giddens, of ultimately reducing structures to human intentions. Archer argues that Bhaskar's reformulation of this

problematic maintains that the causal powers of structures pre-exist human behaviour even if both are related in distinctive ways. But, as Jessop (2003) has also shown, even though this is the case the TMSA 'tends to retain the familiar dualism of structure and agency because, at any given point in the analysis, it brackets one or other aspect of the resulting duality' (Jessop 2003: 141). In other words, while the TMSA provides a useful corrective to similar theories, it still nevertheless explores both structure and agency as separate social entities rather than exploring them as refracted social forms of specific historical systems. At a methodological level this is most noticeable with the formulation CMO. At each stage in this formulation structure (e.g., resources) and agency (e.g., reasons) act as distinct moments with which to organise empirical material.

From the discussion above of the molar, molecular and strategic nature of the capitalist state it is possible to refocus the structure–agency problematic bound up within the TMSA. What we can now say is that a combination of molar formations and molecular elements help to maintain the ideological nature of strategies within the contradictory limits social form. Molar formations do so by encouraging some strategies to emerge that forge alliances with some expressive molecular elements at the expense of others. This further implies that individuals and groups must orientate their own interests and identities around the strategies inscribed in social forms, that is, they must become self-reflexive about the strategic terrain of social forms and engage in learning capacities about the institutions that facilitate these structures. Importantly, social forms are not only a strategically inscribed terrain of struggle between molar and molecular configurations, they are also overdetermined by the social form within which they operate. In turn molar formations and molecular elements can alter a social form by introducing new strategies within its boundaries in order to overcome contradictions and various struggles for hegemony between individuals and groups. And, clearly, this approach to looking at structure and agency alters our understanding of them, along with how we examine mechanisms. For now we do not merely want to explore the resources and reasons of why people act in a particular way. Rather, we are interested in social forms and their strategic and structural selectivity, how both influence strategic learning and, more importantly, affect power, struggles and ideologies around hegemonic interests within a specific social form. It is not merely the case that structures and mechanisms are *emergent* from other structures and mechanisms. Structures and mechanisms are also *refracted* and *strategic* forms of wider social relations.

But a strategic methodological standpoint is also advantageous in making us aware of the limits of systematic abstraction. For it is also true to say that systematic abstraction is limited in its scope because it is primarily concerned with the logical interconnections and development of a system within a particular point in time (see also Reuten 2000: 151). It is in this sense that systematic abstraction is not particularly useful in exploring transition between systems, nor how a single system changes and alters its form over time. Thus just as Marx did not limit his exposition of capitalism to one method of abstraction, such as systematic abstraction, so is it the case that we must also not succumb to limiting our methodological exposition of an object of investigation to one particular abstraction (see Ollman 2003). Focusing upon strategic relations therefore adds an important dimension to systematic abstraction. It directs our attention to the relational development of a social form in the sense that it focuses our attention to the everyday manifestation of the crisis-tendencies of a social form rather than the logical and systematic development of a social form. I now develop some of these observations about the strategic moment of method.

The crisis of discursive mechanisms

To answer the question of how particular crises emerge within a social form in order to explore them, the first step is to distinguish a crisis *of* a social form from a crisis *in* a social form. The latter crisis denotes merely a partial breakdown of a particular generative mechanism in a social form due to its contradictory form, which can be solved within its existing ideological boundaries. But if an identity crisis escalates, to the extent that other contradictions emerge thus leading to further crises in other generative mechanisms, then the fundamental motivational structure of a social form can also go into crisis. If this happens then a *total* breakdown in the functioning of the social form transpires (cf. Habermas 1975; O'Connor 1987; Offe 1984). As a result a social researcher must be attuned to the various ways in which the social form in question is regulated so that the crisis-tendencies of particular mechanisms are suspended (for a detailed account of Marxist theories of suspending crisis-tendencies see Clarke 1994). To put the same point differently, the social researcher should aim to explore the varied and complex ways that social behaviour is governed and regulated within a social context, along with the various ways that generative mechanisms are prevented from going into crisis by other regulatory mechanisms. The implication is clear. Rather than investigating which family of mechanisms work best in which context (the

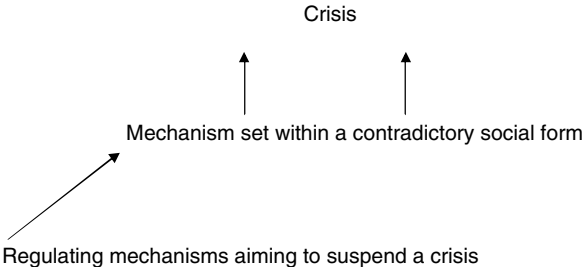

Figure 3.5 Suspending a crisis in a social form

CMO formulation), it would be more reasonable from a Marxist perspective to use the following formulation: CSF – M – Cr – RM, where CSF equals contradictory social form, M equals mechanism, Cr equals crisis and RM equals regulatory mechanism. The idea that regulatory mechanisms exist to suspend a crisis is represented by Figure 3.5.

An example of a prominent regulatory mechanism in contemporary capitalist societies is that of the abstract machine of law. Recent developments in Marxist theories of law are useful in this respect. Woodiwiss (1998), for example, constructs an innovative Marxist theory of legal discourse that proves fruitful in extending the insights of a Marxist approach to form analysis. According to Woodiwiss, law appears under capitalism as a set of state enunciated discourses which seek to interpellate individuals as 'law abiding'. Law accomplishes this task by acting as a 'second-order' discourse for a diverse range of discourses that can be invoked when these primary discourses are challenged. Law is thus a reactive mechanism to, amongst other things, discourses of governing social behaviour already being articulated within a social form. The law of contract, for example, stands as a second-order discourse that can be invoked if need be to regulate the behaviour of workers within a particular workplace. Woodiwiss goes on to argue that legal discourse, to be seen as being effective, must not arbitrarily impose a set of rules. Rather, law is dependent upon a system of norms that are not seen to contradict one another for its success. This implies that legal discourse must be consistent, coherent and enable a type of closure over its pronouncements. Through coherent and normative legal rules and regulations a type of strategic closure can be provided for generative mechanisms so that the latter do not experience contradictions. Consistency therefore confers a level of autonomy upon capitalist law which is absent in other discourses. But consistency can never appear as itself but must always be

articulated with a substantive legal sign such as 'liberty', 'human rights' or 'free speech' (Woodiwiss 1990, 1998; cf. Norrie 1993; Poulantzas 2000).

Through legal discourse a number of 'sub-mechanisms' can emerge that begin to regulate the specific resources and activity associated with everyday activity within a social. A useful way of thinking about the strategic nature of these sub-mechanisms is through the work of the early twentieth-century legal theorist Wesley Hohfeld (1919). This is because Hohfeld develops the rudiments of a more complex discursive approach to legal relations to the extent that it is possible to infer from his work a number of contrastive legal mechanisms associated with the more abstract workings of legal relations. Hohfeld argues that a liberty entails the freedom to take part in an action and to be free from any duty to either do or not do the action in question. To put the same point another way, a person against whom a liberty is held cannot interfere with the action of another person attached to the liberty in question within a specified context. A right-claim, however, does entail legal protection against interference from another person concerning an action within a specified context. Thus a right-claim entails a relational connection between at least two persons, with one exercising a claim while the other has a duty to respect that claim. Hohfeld goes on to distinguish between the power a person has to modify his/her entitlements in some way or another, and the liability that someone has to the exposure of that power. But individuals may also have certain immunities against the power of another. If this is the case then the power of another becomes disabled (see also Kramer *et al*. 1998; Woodiwiss 1998).

From a methodological viewpoint several observations can be made here. First, through legal discourse we can begin to investigate how the state obtains a degree of mobility in regulating those specific generative mechanisms of a social form in which we are interested. Second, we can begin to theorise about the complex strategic arrangements of the regulatory mechanisms of a social form. The contradictions and crisis-tendencies of a social form are not merely based upon the resources and reasons for acting in precise ways, but are also based upon sets of liberties, rights-claims, powers, and entitlements. Third, these regulatory mechanisms are expressive moments of a social form because they are strategically inscribed. What this means in practice is that regulatory mechanisms do not merely impose order upon a social form but also negotiate order amongst different interest groups in order to produce a relatively stable molar formation.

But, fourth, because regulatory mechanisms are brought about through both coercion and negotiation then the discursive meaning of regulatory mechanisms will often be open to question by different social groups within a social form. For example, if we think of ordinary, day-to-day use of language we see that one word can have many different expressive meanings depending upon who is uttering it and the situation in which it is being uttered (see Voloshinov 1973: 19). Thus by appropriating a word a person will also appropriate a set of 'utterances' composed of distinctive meanings, styles and genres that coalesce around themes to be discussed which are specific to a social form (on these discursive elements see Roberts 2003). Given this, it can be argued that: (i) words and utterances discursively mediate contradictory mechanisms within a social form; (ii) words and utterances are also expressive molecular devices; and that (iii) legal discursive mechanisms will attempt to regulate the meanings, expressions, themes and resources associated with words and utterances (for an interesting discussion on the use of discourse theory in research see Alvesson 2002).

Finally, therefore, in order to conceal specific contradictions there is a need to create an 'alien abstract objectivist', or molar, approach in the everyday use of language in a social form. This is an approach that comprises the '*isolated, finished, monologic utterance*, divorced from its verbal and actual context and standing open not to any sort of active response but to passive understanding' (Voloshinov 1973: 73). The monologic utterance, backed up by law, represents the dominance of abstract, alienated, molar and dead language over the inner dialectical quality of utterances. Monologic regulation will attempt to regulate the meaning and everyday themes attached to those mechanisms that people use to communicate to one another and to represent day-to-day life within a social form. This form of regulation can be depicted as in Figure 3.6.

Building upon the earlier discussion we could add that only during a motivation crisis, when the very regulatory identity of a social form is questioned, does the inner dialectical nature of a word emerge in abundance. At this point the very legal nature of regulatory mechanisms are challenged. During a legitimation crisis these connections will not be made. However, at all moments a dominant ideology will try to stabilise both motivation and legitimation crises through legal discourse, 'so accentuating yesterday's truth as to make it appear todays' (Voloshinov 1973: 24).

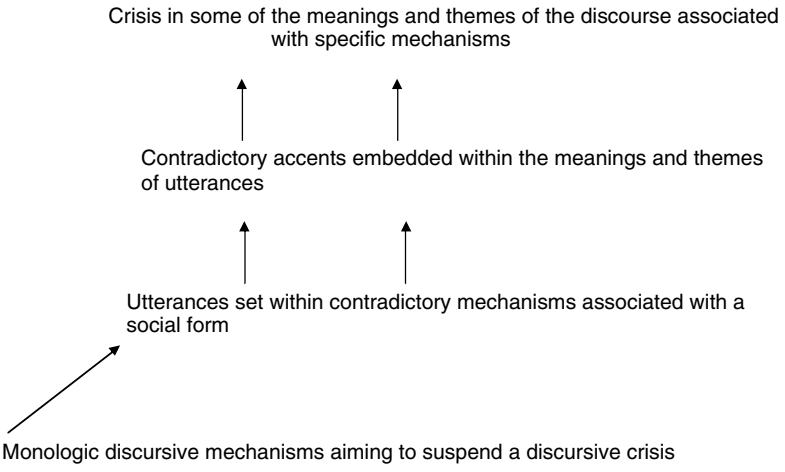

Figure 3.6 Suspending a discursive crisis in a social form

Conclusion

The idea that mechanisms, events and experiences are mediated through refracted, or historical, social forms is a point of utmost importance in rescuing critical realist method from a nagging criticism. Bhaskar has claimed that when studying the social world method cannot make predictions in the way that natural scientists do because, as we have seen, the social world is 'open' and thus not readily amenable to the sort of 'closed' laboratory experiments that natural scientists undertake on a daily basis. Instead of predictions social scientists must rest content with making *explanations* (see Bhaskar 1998: 45–46). Hence Bhaskar's and critical realism's resort to the method of retroduction. But, as Kemp and Holmwood (2003) observe, this claim rests upon the fallacy that suggests we have to rely upon our existing knowledge of social structures in order to retroduce further knowledge about their mechanisms. 'That is to say, an event is to be explained using existing knowledge of structures, their causal influence and the conditions of their exercise' (Kemp and Holmwood 2003: 169). This leads Kemp and Holmwood to suggest that far from revealing new information about a structure in an open-system, retroduction essentially relies upon a priori information about the structure in question. Acquiring new knowledge about a particular structure by explaining an event associated with the structure in question through tests cannot therefore be achieved within

an open-system but can only be arrived at in a closed system where, of course, constant conjunctions of events exist. But this empiricist methodology is an anathema to critical realist sensibilities.

However, while Kemp and Holmwood highlight a dilemma with critical realist methodology, this dilemma is significantly lessened once a 'historical domain' is introduced in the manner argued for here. By insisting that mechanisms are mediated through qualitatively distinct social forms, themselves a refracted form of more abstract historical determinations, it follows that the social world is not in fact open in the manner suggested by critical realists. Certainly it is true to say that many objects that exist within capitalism are contingent to the extent that they are not strictly necessary for the reproduction of capitalism. But it is nevertheless the case that these objects develop and function within the limits of historical social relations. Thus a system like capitalism essentially constrains and defines how objects operate. Obviously this is not a straightforward functionalist and reductionist relationship, that is, objects can simply be reduced to the functional requirements of capitalism. As I suggested a key element for a Marxist methodology is that of 'contradiction'. When we look at the world as a series of contradictions then a space will always open up for objects to gain a relative degree of autonomy from the more abstract determinations of a system. Even so, it is important to point out that systems are not as open and contingent as critical realists frequently suggest. Rather, systems are overdetermined by recognisable ideological forms that are reproduced in a myriad of ways. Perhaps it is because systems, particularly that of capitalism, can reproduce themselves into so many concrete forms that critical realists argue that systems are open and contingent. But from a Marxist perspective this pushes the determining baby out of the closed bathwater. 'Openness' within systems always works within the 'closed' limits and determinations of historical social relations. The capitalist state can assume many forms, none of which are necessary for the reproduction of capitalism. However, the state is at the same time a *capitalist* state because it has been given a unique ideological and social form by having to operate within the historical determinations and limits of capitalism.

Thus, in one respect at least, we can agree with Kemp and Holmwood's case against critical realists insofar that 'open-systems' cannot provide a rigorous basis for social explanation. And yet by exploring the social form of structures we do have a basis for explanation on rather more solid foundations than that provided by critical realism. For Marxist form analysis suggests that structures are the *contingent* outcome

of *necessary* and historical determinations. Why a government pursues a particular policy at a moment in time is obviously a contingent question. In such circumstances, and given inherent contradictions and crisis-tendencies which they face, it would be futile to try to *predict* policy choice by a government. We can never be sure in advance which policy will be enacted over others. However, the contingent nature in which a government policy appears is nevertheless mediated by necessary determinations at a high level of abstraction (e.g., contradictions inherent within the capitalist mode of production and contradictions inherent within the capitalist state form), that are in turn mediated by the strategic nature that social forms assume in time and space. Explanation, on this understanding, seeks to combine 'openness' with 'closed systems' by maintaining that even contingent forms refract a higher level contradictory essence in its own unique manner. If this is the case then we can say that the 'regularity' associated with, say, the capitalist mode of production or the capitalist state *at a high level of abstraction*, reproduces *patterns of connection* at lower of abstraction. Like natural science, therefore, social science should look for the reproduction of 'regular closed essences', but do so in a way that explores connections between abstract historical determinations and their more 'open', concrete and contingent forms.

Thus one of the key concepts that Marxism can incorporate from critical realism in this regard is that of mechanisms. As I have tried to show, mechanisms focus our methodological attention upon how a social context, or social form, gains a degree of stability through modes of regulation. In essence, mechanisms should prompt us to explore how a social form manages to momentarily suspend specific contradictions and thus to suspend crisis-tendencies in the social form in question. Thus rather than examine how mechanisms might for example make policy programmes work, a more Marxist-inspired realist method would ask whether those mechanisms associated with a policy programme act ideologically to suspend crisis tendencies in favour of a specific hegemonic project. Obviously we could deepen such an analysis by bringing in more contradictions as these affect the form in question, but the important point to make is that mechanisms are mediated, that is, how they are given a specific historical and ideological form, by wider social relations. The aim is to analyse how mechanisms are integrally related to these social relations, and how they either prove functional to them or prove problematic.

4

Marxism, the Dialectic of Freedom and Emancipation

Jonathan Joseph

It is now over ten years since Roy Bhaskar wrote *Dialectic: The Pulse of Freedom*, a crucial turning point in the relationship between critical realism, Marxism and the project of human emancipation. This chapter will briefly outline how Bhaskar's previous work had sought to aid Marxism in clarifying issues of social ontology and explanatory critique before focusing on issues in the book *Dialectic* itself which have made the relationship more problematic. As Colin Wight has shown in his chapter, the latest books by Bhaskar (pace 'spiritual turn') offer very little by way of an emancipatory politics, buying into much of the currently fashionable new age lifestyle spiritualism to the detriment of a political project. Although some of these issues will be covered in the final section, the main purpose of this chapter is to look at how such a damaging turn could have come about by examining the weakness present in *Dialectic*. By way of a positive contribution, I shall begin with what is valuable in Bhaskar's earlier work and conclude by indicating how this, along with some of the arguments in *Dialectic*, might be developed in a more positive direction.

How critical realism can help Marxism

Perhaps the main strength of critical realism is its advocacy of an ontological approach that moves beyond questions of knowledge and action to ask what the world itself must be like for these to be the case. We argued in Chapter 1 how critical realism differs from its rivals (poststructuralism, hermeneutics and positivism) in placing emphasis on social ontology. This is a depth ontology that conceives of social analysis at the level of underlying structures and generative mechanisms. From here critical realism brings in human action as taking place within a

structured social totality where it reproduces or transforms social relations. In order to add weight to this insight, it can be argued that critical realism turns to Marxist social theory in order to explain exactly what these structures are, how they operate and exactly how social agents act within this context. Critical realism therefore helps do the ontological groundwork in arguing that the world is structured in a certain way and that agents act within a certain context, while Marxism provides the social scientific analysis of exactly what form these structures, tendencies and generative mechanisms take and how forms of action might develop.

However, it is not the case that critical realism does the groundwork and then Marxism takes over, not least because it is never entirely clear what Marxism is. Marxism is a much disputed tradition and being a Marxist does not necessarily have to imply having the kind of structural conception of the social world consistent with the arguments of a critical realist approach. Among the different schools of Marxism, there are those influenced by the praxis tradition that tend to regard a focus on structure as itself a form of the reification of the social world. Thus the praxis-oriented theorists like Korsch, Lukács, to a lesser extent Gramsci (and the neo-Gramscians in International Relations theory), and more recently the Open Marxist school, argue that social structures are nothing if not the activities of human beings engaged in struggle (Bonefeld *et al*. 1992: xii). To give an example from Marxist historiography, E. P. Thompson argues in his introduction to *The Making of the English Working Class* that class is not so much a structure as a historical relationship which occurs 'when some men, as a result of common experiences (inherited or shared), feel and articulate the identity of their interests as between themselves and as against other men' (Thompson 1968: 9). Thus

> If we stop history at a given point, there are no classes but simply a multitude of individuals with a multitude of experiences. But if we watch these men over an adequate period of social change, we observe patterns in their relationships, their ideas, and their institutions. (ibid., 11)

The problem with this type of approach – whether we chose to call it praxis philosophy or inter-subjectivism or historicism – is that social structure is denied any necessary ontological status of its own. Social structure, rather than being the necessary condition for social activity, becomes its reproduced outcome. Its ontological status is, at most, the

sum of human interaction. The result is that at best we are left with a structuration theory (such as might be found in Giddens) that argues that social structures are instantiated through human actions (that structures and agents are mutually constitutive), at worst, that there is a complete focus on human agency to the detriment of the socio-structural conditions under which this takes place and which shapes the type of activity that occurs and the forms that it takes.

These forms of praxis Marxism commit a number of ontological errors that are outlined by Bhaskar in his critique of Gramsci (although Gramsci is by no means wholly guilty as I have argued elsewhere (Joseph 2002)). First, Bhaskar argues that Gramsci replaces the notion of objectivity with one of universal subjectivity which is asymptotically approached in history and finally realised under communism. This approach sees Marxism, not as offering objective knowledge of society, but rather, as expressing the universal view of a subject – for Gramsci objective means universal (or historical) subjective (Gramsci 1971: 445), for Lukács this is represented as the subject–object of history which realises itself by comprehending its own situation. Gramsci, in collapsing objectivity and subjectivity, comes to the view that Marxism 'contains in itself all the fundamental elements needed to construct a total conception of the world' (Gramsci 1971: 462), an error that reduces scientific knowledge to the worldviews and understandings of certain groups. Bhaskar argues that there is a double collapse in Gramsci's historicist philosophy. He conflates the mind-independent objects of knowledge with the historical processes by which this knowledge develops (the epistemic fallacy of conflating the real world with the knowledge we have of it). He also collapses what Bhaskar calls the intrinsic and extrinsic conditions of science, failing to differentiate between internal necessity and external contingency and reducing science to an expression of the historical process (Bhaskar 1991: 172–174).

Critical realism can provide a great service to Marxism in arguing against those approaches that employ what might be termed a praxis ontology that ultimately contains two fallacies – the epistemic fallacy of reducing the objectivity of reality to the knowledge we have of it and the anthropic error of reducing objectivity to the actions and understandings of human beings. Implicit in these views is an ontology that sees the world in terms of inter-subjective praxis, rather than in terms of objective, material social relations. What critical realism can offer Marxism is an explicitly structural social ontology that allows us to focus on the specificity of social relations and the process by which they are reproduced without reducing these to human praxis or self-understanding. In

contrast to hermeneutic and poststructural approaches, critical realism argues that the social world, like the natural world is comprised of a series of structures and generative mechanisms which provide the context for different human practices, actions and understandings. The different layers of the social world overlap, mutually co-determine and complement or contradict one another. To examine structure poses the question of whether this structure, or ensemble of structures, is hierarchical. It is argued that some structures are emergent out of others; that is they are based in lower-order structures, but develop their own irreducible properties and powers. To examine the complexity of society is to examine its overdetermined and contradictory character. Louis Althusser develops the notion of overdetermination – or the interactions, contradictions and uneven developments of the social whole. This fits well with critical realism's emphasis on a stratified and overlapping social totality where the different layers interact and co-determine each other. A recognition of the historicity of social relations requires an investigation of the necessary conditions for the reproduction of the social formation and the different ways these conditions are realised through various structural combinations and interactions.

The standard criticism of Althusser is that his theory reifies human agency and sees it as merely reproducing social structure. Thus agents, it is claimed, are reduced to the status of mere bearers of objective social structures. Without going into this debate (or looking at how others within this tradition such as Poulantzas revised their earlier positions), the issue for a critical realist approach is whether it is possible to maintain a focus on structures without entirely eliminating agency. Against the charge of reification (in Bhaskar's case he chooses the example of Durkheimian functionalism rather than structural Marxism), critical realism recognises that social agency is important, but unlike praxis Marxism, it allows us to clearly locate this within a specific structural context. Structure and agency are combined in Bhaskar's transformational model of social activity (TMSA) which argues that structures are both the necessary condition for and the reproduced outcome of human activity. The TMSA should be seen in opposition to the praxis-driven approach of Giddensian structuration theory which argues that structures and agents are mutually determining, in effect reducing structures to their moment of instatiation by human agency (usually through routinised activity), without conceiving of how the process of instantiation is itself structurally grounded. Starting with the ontological claim that social structures pre-exist the agents who reproduce them, the TMSA argues that such structures generate and distribute upon agents certain

causal powers, social identities and interests that are then expressed through praxis. An ontological analysis is necessary to examine the generation of these interests in their structural context and to assess the possibilities and limitations that these structures present for human action. The TMSA, by indicating how the reproduction of social structures is dependent on human activity, highlights the possibility of social transformation, but it ties this to a definite set of social structures and the particular causal powers conferred upon agents.

The next step is to examine who has what powers. This requires an analysis of the location of the various collectives of social agents and the transformative capacities that they might have. The act of transformation is the job of the agents themselves, while the description of social transformation is the job of the political analyst and requires an examination of the particular conditions under which such action is to take place. The role of critical realism is not to conduct such scientific investigation, but to provide the philosophical underpinnings to such an analysis, in particular, through insisting on a structured depth ontology, and critiquing those approaches that conflate the different aspects of the social world. As well as providing such ontological underpinning, critical realism can also work alongside Marxist theory in a more emancipatory sense. It can outline what Bhaskar calls an explanatory critique, where a critique of certain ideas, leads to a negative evaluation of the source of these ideas and, consequently, a positive evaluation of action designed to remedy this. Indeed, Bhaskar gives Marx's critique of political economy as an example of how it is capitalist society itself that must be changed if we are to confront the illusionary or false consciousness that it produces (Bhaskar 1989a: 5). Marx's explanations logically entail a negative evaluation of that which generates such ideas and a commitment to its practical transformation (ibid.: 135). Again realist philosophy engages in an underlabouring role, working alongside social theory rather than trying to usurp its role. Critical realism assists Marxism through its insistence on an ontological approach that focuses on the way that the world is objectively structured and how this structure is the source of certain ideas and practices that need to be challenged. Praxis is given a central role, but only after its precise context is determined.

So, with this account based on the earlier works of critical realism, we have a clear idea of what it is we are trying to do. In particular, critical realism provides social theory with an explicit ontology that emphasises the importance of structural context. It argues the need to apply social science in order to examine the nature of these social structures and how

they inter-relate. From here we can then identify who are the key agents and how they should act within this context. This activity is grounded in the reality of actual social relations and in the possibilities they afford to social agents.

The dialecticisation of critical realism

The above has set out the ways in which critical realism and Marxism may work together. However, it must be stressed that this relationship, while hugely beneficial, is also highly problematic insofar as it is not always clear who is doing what. Critical realism clearly has a more philosophical role while Marxism is social scientific, but social science has a philosophy and methodology, while philosophy and methodology are entangled in social enquiry. Previously (Joseph 2001a) I have tried to insist that the role of critical realism should be limited to philosophical underlabouring for the sciences, but this is clearly not entirely possible even if it is one crucial aspect of what critical realism does. The social world is a conceptual world and so social analysis and conceptual analysis will inevitably overlap. We should say, therefore, that Marxism is primarily a form of social theory and critical realism is primarily a philosophical / conceptual approach, but that the philosophy of critical realism is strongest when it is expressed through sciences like Marxism that say something about the social world, while Marxism is clearly stronger when it has had its epistemology and methodology clarified, and when its focus on the social world has been philosophically guided and directed by a an explicitly realist ontology.

The balance between philosophy and social theory becomes important when considering the 'dialectical turn' in critical realism and whether or not this can still support a Marxist social science. Dialectical critical realism (DCR) is a far more ambitious project as far as claims about the nature of the social world and human activity are concerned. Bhaskar's book *Dialectic: The Pulse of Freedom* deepens critical realism's emphasis on emancipation by making freedom its central concern. This would seem to be compatible with Marxism insofar as the book focuses on human needs and the obstacles to the satisfaction of those needs, thus posing the question of action designed to remove such obstacles. This approach parallels that of the explanatory critique and Bhaskar argues that he moves from dialectical explanation to explanatory critique, to emancipatory critique, to the idea of dialectic as the pulse of freedom. In a rewording of Marx's famous remark, Bhaskar states that his argument for dialectical universalisability poses the question of

a society where 'the free flourishing of each is the condition for the free flourishing of all' (Bhaskar 1993: 202).

The most significant move in the dialecticisation of critical realism is the development of the MELD system (see Table 4.1). This sets out four dialectical realms which build on the earlier critical realism (now described as the first moment) by adding new domains of absence (second edge), totalisation (third level) and transformative praxis (fourth dimension). Thus, according to the MELD schema, the first moment (1M) is broadly compatible with the critical realist ontology sketched in the first section of this chapter and includes issues like structure and stratification, transfactual efficacy, superstructure-formation and superstructuration, emergence and change. These categories, it is claimed (Bhaskar and Norrie 1998), are developed and 'dialecticised' in light of the categories of the second edge (2E). The second edge focuses on the issues of absence and negativity which in turn grounds a dialectics of process, change, interchange and transition and determinate transformative negation. 2E brings the concept of change under that of absence in that it sees changes as absentings and regards human agency as embodied intentional causal absenting (Bhaskar 1993: 198). 2E is crucial to the dialecticising of critical realism in that

> 2E not only unifies but itself satisfies all the moments of dialectical critical realism. It is stratified in a hierarchy of concepts, grounded in absence. It is dynamic in its essence (real negation is absenting process). It is totalising in that it coheres the system as a whole. And it is transformative, in that it includes transformative praxis understood as absenting absentive agency, oriented to change. It is the dialectical moment par excellence. (1993: 250)

The third level (3L) is that of totalisation. This is implicit in 2E in that an absence or incompleteness generates contradiction, split or alienation that can only be remedied through resort to a wider, deeper or more encompassing totality. 3L is the domain of dialectical totality where phenomena are seen as part of a whole. Finally, the fourth dimension (4D) is that of dialectical praxis. 4D constitutes embedded intentional causal agency. It is the terrain of democracy, enlightenment, emancipation, concrete utopianism and explanatory critique as well as contraries like alienation, illusion and disempowerment and the fragmentation of the self (1993: 307). The fourth dimension constitutes the unity of theory and practice *in practice* (1993: 9).

Table 4.1 Dialectical critical realism

		Characteristics	Emphasises	Dialectical Moment	Criticises
IM	First moment	Stratification and differentiation of the world Real, actual and empirical	Causal powers Generative mechanisms Reality of structures and their causal powers (transfactuality) Natural necessity Alethic truth (real reasons or ground of truth as distinct from propositions)	Stratification and ground inversion	Error of de-stratification
2E	Second edge	Unified by category of absence Critique of purely positive accounts of reality (ontological monovalence)	Negation and change Negativity Contradiction Critique Unity of causality, space and time	Process Transition Frontier Node Opposition and reversal	Error of positivisation
3L	Third level	Unified by category of totality	Reflexivity Emergence Internal relations Holistic causality Conversely: de-totalisation, alienation and split	Centre and periphery Form and content Figure and ground De-alienation Re-totalisation Unity-in-diversity	Error of de-totalisation
4D	Fourth dimension	Unified by category of transformative praxis or agency	Emergent powers materialism – (agency rooted in but not reducible to its material conditions) Four planar social being	Ideological and material struggles Desire to freedom	Error of reification

Continued

Table 4.1 Continued

Characteristics	Emphasises	Dialectical Moment	Criticises
	(comprised of a. material transactions with nature, b. inter-/intra-subjective relations, c. social relations, d. intra-subjectivity		

Source: Bhaskar 1993: 392–393.

In terms of appropriate dialectical moments (as can be seen from the above Table 4.1), at 1M dialectic is the principle of stratification and emergence, something we have already outlined (and which somewhat reinforces the view that critical realism was already dialectical prior to the 'dialectical turn'). At 2E the dialectic is that of modalities of negation and critique. 3L dialectics are of totality, detotalising absence, reflexivity and concrete singularity (the core species-being, particular mediations and rhythmics that uniquely individualises a human being (1993: 395)). 4D dialectics of are those of transformative praxis. Bhaskar argues that the full dialectical process moves from dialectical explanation to explanatory critique to dialectic as the axiology of freedom (1993: 202). Thus freedom is stratified at 1M, composed of different levels and degrees, a geo-historical process of absenting constraints. 2E is the moment of 'concrete utopianism' which identifies the positive in the negative, grounded in possibilities in process while 3L is a totalisation and empowerment which is realised at 4D through totalising collective self-absenting of ills (1993: 294). This logic of dialectical universalisability is described as

> absence (2E) – primal scream – desire – referential detachment (1M) – alethic truth – assertoric judgement – dialectical iniversalizability (3L) – universal human emancipation (4D) – eudaimonistic society-in-process. (1993: 295)

Bhaskar compares this process to Marx's goal of an association where 'the free development of each is the condition for the free development of all', but this is Marx at his most universalist and utopian. However, to draw this out we will first engage with dialectical critical realism's different levels.

Stratification and absence

We can see that Bhaskar's conception of dialectic is quite different from traditional Marxist conceptions, not to mention Hegelian formulations like thesis, antithesis and synthesis. There is no doubt that some of Bhaskar's formulations can be used to shed new light on traditional Marxist understandings and the new emphasis on absence is particularly interesting in challenging purely positive (and thus non-dialectical) accounts of social reality. However, this section will look at some of the problems connected with *Dialectic*'s first two levels (1M and 2E). First, it might be argued that very little was wrong with those issues of structure, stratification and emergence that are now covered by the category 1M. Bhaskar argues that the earlier critical realism, for which these were essential concepts, has now been 'dialecticised'. But it is hard to see how these could have ever been anything else. Concepts of stratification and emergence are already dialectical concepts related to dialectical issues of co-determination, contradiction and overdetermination. What is more, such concepts have an ontological specificity missing in much traditional Marxist dialectics. Instead of mystical notions of interpenetration of opposites and the negation of the negation, we are provided with concepts that mean something in socio-structural and causal terms (directing us to an analysis of concrete social forms rather than generalised schemas). If one of the jobs of critical realism is to help clarify and refine Marxist concepts, then the existing categories of structure, stratification and emergence were working just fine.

What the dialecticisation of critical realism does add is an emphasis on negativity that supposedly transforms the 1M categories. It is argued that 1M depends on non-identity, alterity and other-being. Therefore Bhaskar argues that

> For 1M realism the world is characterized by intransitivity, stratification, transfactuality, multi-tiered depth, emergence (a condition of possibility of agency), multiple control and change. It thus presupposes transformative negation, contradiction, at least partially connected nexuses or fields and reflexive monitoring socialized agents with the causal power to intervene in nature if they wish to do so. (1993: 134)

It can be seen how Bhaskar is introducing categories of absence to define the character of 1M. But it might be wondered why this presupposes the reflexive monitoring of socialised agents. Already we can see how 1M is dependent not only on the categories of absence present at 2E, but also the categories of negation present at 4D. The lines below will indicate the dangers of intrusive negativity, the next section will deal with the intrusiveness of 4D agency.

Perhaps the most important development in *Dialectic* is Bhaskar's critique of what he calls 'ontological monovalence' or a purely positive account of reality. This can be linked to a critique of positivist science and those approaches that 'positivise' science and reinforce the status quo of things as they appear to us rather than as they actually are. Bhaskar's approach is therefore comparable to the earlier critiques of positivism, pure-presence and identity thinking outlined in the negative dialectics of Adorno and the deconstruction of Derrida but has the advantage of being more ontological in its implications in that it is more of an account of the nature of reality itself as opposed to the more epistemological focus of Adorno and Derrida. Whereas Derrida and Adorno target theories – namely logocentric and positivist accounts of the social world – Bhaskar asks what the world itself must be like in order for conflict, change and radical alterity to be possible. This should put us in a position to move on to a discussion of things like a Marxist critique of society and its mode of production. The trouble with Bhaskar's boldness in arguing for negativity at 2E, however, is that the argument quickly moves from a critique of ontological monovalence to the ontological claim that the positive is but 'a tiny, but important, ripple on the surface of a sea of negativity' (1993: 5). This is apparently because 'Negativity is constitutively essential to positivity, but the converse does not follow … by transcendental argument, non-being is constitutively essential to being. Non-being is a condition of possibility of being' (1993: 46). This may be so, but this is different from saying that negativity has primacy over positivity. To push Bhaskar's point further is to enter the realms of what Andrew Collier calls non-scientific cosmology (Collier 1998a). Such is the case with Bhaskar's statement that 'Within the world as we know it, non-being is at least on a par with being. Outwith it the negative has ontological primacy' (Bhaskar 1993: 47). This is certainly less a case of careful transcendental argument as might be found in Bhaskar's earlier work than outright assertion.

The problem is that by replacing pure positivity with almost total negativity, Bhaskar rather undermines his advocacy of ontological bivalence or polyvalence, where objects are seen as being constituted by both positive and negative processes. Furthermore, by emphasising

what is not over what is, there is a danger of losing causal (and descriptive) specificity and certainly it takes us a long way from the practice of social science. By giving primacy to negativity and non-being, we soon lose track of the specific ontological insights of critical realism's first moment – such things as structures and generative mechanisms, stratification, causal powers and emergent properties, tendencies, and much else. The fact that these 1M categories are being undermined by an over extension of absence at 2E indicates a wider problem – that of the over-systematisation of Bhaskar's philosophy to the point where the overall framework starts to undermine the insights of the different levels, not least, those issues at 1M that inform a Marxist social ontology.

Bhaskar's concept of negation bridges the gap between 2E and 4D. First he talks of real negation – real determinate absence or non-being, the hidden, the empty, the outside, lack or need. This, it is argued, drives the dialectic. Real negation is a systematic process of mediating, distancing and absenting (1993: 5). Then he introduces transformative negation as the transformation of some thing, property or state of affairs, the absenting of a previous situation. These are all cases of real negation, but the opposite is not the case. Real negation is the most all-encompassing concept while transformative negation, as an aspect of this, is the key to social dialectics (1993: 6). Therefore

> As transformative praxis consists in transformative negation the dialectics of 2E can subsume and unify the dialectics of 4D. Thus we have the dialectics of interchange and reversal, of hegemonic / counter-hegemonic struggle, of position and manoeuvre, of structural and conjunctural inversion. (1993: 243)

The status of negativity at 2E is to provide the basis for agency at 4D. If 2E establishes absences, then the absenting of these absences is the basis for transformative praxis at 4D. The absenting of absence manifests in the satisfaction of desire. Therefore 'dialectics depends upon the positive identification and transformative elimination of absences' (1993: 43) and '*absenting constraints on absenting absences* is the *alethia of dialectic*' (1993: 177).

Transformative praxis

Praxis at 4D is driven by informed desire. Bhaskar writes that agents have an interest in removing constraints on their freedom in order to satisfy their desires. 2E absence imposes the geo-historical directionality

that brings about a more human society based on 'a conatus to deconstraint or freedom' (1993: 169). The fourth dimension confirms dialectic as a dialectic of freedom where

> A malaise is an ill and a constraint. Insofar as it is unwanted and unneeded, we are rationally impelled, ceteris paribus … to a commitment to absent it, and thus to an absenting practice. And thence to absenting all dialectically similar ills, and thus to absent all the *causes* of such constraints. (1993: 287)

Insofar as an ill is unwanted, transformative negation or temporal-causal absenting presupposes a universalisability to absenting agency in all dialectically similar circumstances. Transformative praxis presupposes the absenting of all similar constraints. Bhaskar talks of an inexorable logic of dialectical universalisability, absenting of all such constraints, all master–slave type relations and other inequalities, leading to a society where the free development of each is condition for free development of all: 'So the goal of universal human autonomy is implicit in every moral judgement' (1993: 264).

Bhaskar introduces a four-planar model of social being based on (1) material transactions with nature, (2) inter-personal, intra- or inter-action, (3) social relations, (4) intra-subjectivity. Our desire to overcome constraints implies conatus or tendency to knowledge across all four planes of the social cube (1993: 180). (Bhaskar talks of the social cube as four-planar despite the fact that a cube has six planes!) This is meant to enrich the transformational model of social activity and providing this is the case, rather than being a *replacement* of the TMSA, then this is a useful addition to our understanding of structure and agency. This development is also connected to Bhaskar's important distinction between power1 which is the transformative capacity intrinsic to the concept of agency as such and power2 as exercised, manifest, mobilised, ideologically legitimated, discursively moralised (1993: 153). Power2 as discursively moralised (ideologically constituted), generalised master–slave relations (1993: 120) helps us to understand what Bhaskar is getting at when he talks of hermeneutic hegemonic / counter-hegemonic struggles around structures of domination, exploitation and control. There are a potentially indefinite number of these power2 relations – sex, gender, ethnicity, nationality, class and so on (1993: 101). Bhaskar argues that we need a depth-totalising counter-hegemonic struggle. But this goes against how we have traditionally understood what a hegemonic struggle is, certainly in Gramscian terms, as a combination of various

interests under the leadership of a particular group. By generalising master–slave struggles, Bhaskar's explanation loses any specificity (for more on hegemonic struggles see Joseph 2000, 2001b, 2002).

The problem is that by this stage Bhaskar is making so many general claims that it is difficult to see how each can be substantiated. By what mechanism are the oppressed in power2 relations to achieve their emancipation? In accordance with what standards of consistency and universalisability are they to reason? (1993: 169). Bhaskar's claims, because they are of a transcendental philosophical nature fail to raise the specificity of the class issue under capitalism. Only a form of social analysis such as that provided by Marxism can identify the appropriate structures, mechanisms and agents responsible for social transformation. This is based on the recognition that the form and potential of transformation will be different according to our location and relations – not something universalisable, but realised in its concrete specificity.

This is partly recognised:

> Because we are inhabitants of a dialectical pluriverse, characterized by complex, plural, contradictory, differentiated, disjoint but also coalescing and condensing development and antagonistic struggles over discursively moralized power2 relations, subject to regression, entropy and roll-back, we cannot expect the *dialectic of real geo-historical processes*, from which the logic of totality, i.e. of dialectical universalizability, starts and to which it always returns, to be anything but a messy affair. (1993: 280)

However, it is an affair that Bhaskar is nevertheless prepared to pursue. He goes on to talk of universal human emancipation from unnecessary constraints. Freedom as flourishing through the realisation of possibilities requires universal human flourishing, the satisfaction of needs and universal well-being (1993: 283). This allows for rational and universal autonomy and self-determination. It hinges on Marx's statement about the eudaimonistic society where the free development of each is a condition for the free development of all. But should freedom be interpreted in terms of autonomy? Likewise, Bhaskar talks of alienation in terms of losing part of one's autonomy, being other than what one is, being separated or estranged from oneself (1993: 114). Not only is this rather individualistic and egocentric, it is also a utopian notion that we can somehow step above processes of social determination to achieve autonomy of being.

Bhaskar argues for the absenting of ills that compromise freedom, but what is this freedom / autonomy that he is concerned with? We are

never free to do as we please. We always have constraints. Whether such constraints are ills or not is a debatable issue. Whether they can be absented is another. If they are power2 relations – that is, power exercised over us – then we might conceive of removing these constraints. But we are also constrained – as well as enabled – by power1 relations. These are the relations of social structure. These are the structures that enable us to act, but also determine and limit what we can do. We can never be free from these relations – indeed it is illogical to talk of this since these relations are in some sense the ground of what freedom we do possess. To talk of these structures is to raise the issue of social transformation under very specific conditions. But the universalising dialectic of freedom has long since moved us away from a debate about issues of 1M causality, structure-stratification and emergent possibility.

Dialectical critical realism involves a dialectics of truth, desire and freedom and a dialectical praxis of absenting absences and constraints. However, with absence becoming the over-riding factor, the question of emancipation becomes confused. Bhaskar's universalised ethics that, like Kant, argues from what is to what ought to be, also suffers from a lack of the kind of precision that can only be achieved by applying philosophy to a scientific approach. For Marx, issues of freedom and ethics are related to the specificities of class society, the mode of production and our relation with nature. By contrast, Bhaskar's dialectic of freedom is based, on the struggle against ubiquitous master–slave relationships – those of domination, subjugation, exploitation, oppression, repression and control – and a neo-Kantian or quasi-Habermasian conception of universalisable, dialogical human ethics, arguing that every action and desire implies a claim for freedom from constraint which is universalisable.

However, the importance of Marx lies, not in a utopian and impractical desire to remove *all* constraints or power2 relations, but in his attempt to analyse the specific basis of capitalist society and to reveal the dominant mechanisms of this system, thus opening up the possibility of their transformation through definite forms of social action. Bhaskar's call for the study of all master–slave relations should not mean a turn away from the fundamental importance of relations of production and the study of the dominant dynamic within *capitalist* society which requires, most expressly, a study of the logic of *capital*.

In giving a more 'humanist' angle to 4D questions of agency, Bhaskar strays too far from a structurally grounded theory of human behaviour, invoking classical humanist and hermeneutic notions of intersubjective rationality, a dialogical conception of human practice and a

transcendentally universal notion of emancipation. Bhaskar's emphasis on agency and praxis and his concern with the struggle for liberation should be welcomed. But the way this is formulated will not stand up to the kind of rigorous social scientific analysis demanded at 1M. In Bhaskar's most recent work on meta-reality, the project of 1M causal-structural explanation seems to be have been abandoned altogether so that the key to emancipation now lies within us. We ourselves have to shed the irrealist categorical structure of the world and realise that we are essentially free. But we will never be free in the sense of being outside of social-structural relations. These relations, as Bhaskar has pointed out, are enabling as well as constraining. The task of an emancipatory project must be to transform such relations. But in order to change the world we must first be able to understand it. Ironically, this means abandoning the dialectic of freedom.

The dangers in *Dialectic*

Bhaskar argues that socialism depends on a dialectic of de-alienation so we are not separated from our means and materials of production. This enlarges into a desire for rights and liberties, universally and reciprocally recognised (1993: 288). Marx's emphasis on dialectic, it is argued, is primarily epistemological – one of conceptual distanciation and transformation (1993: 97). Bhaskar argues that Marx's critique implies epistemological materialism that presupposes a differentiated world and asserts the existential intransitivity and transfactual efficacy of the objects of scientific thought (1993: 91).

Bhaskar criticises Marx in *Dialectic* without going into any detail about such issues. However, he lists them as

1. class/power2 one-dimensionality
2. presentational linearity
3. proleptic endism (a promise) mediated through the residues of
4. technologically derived functionalism
5. prometheanistically displaced triumphalism
6. evolutionism
7. programmatic practical-expressivism (1993: 93)

We can make up our own minds about these – certainly they are issues where a critical realist philosophy can act as a corrective if needed. Bhaskar's main criticism of Marx in *Dialectic* is that 'he does not engage, except in occasional writings, in the globalization of capitalist production

and remains fixated on the wage-labour / capital relation at the expense of the totality of master–slave relations' (1993: 333).

Here we see that while philosophy may posit some transcendental conditions, social science must focus on concrete particulars. Bhaskar is quite wrong to talk of Marx's 'fixation' with the capital – labour relation when in fact this is an example of the critical realist method of isolating dominant causal mechanisms within a stratified complexity of relations (see the introduction to Marx's *Grundrisse* (1973) for the best summary of this method). It is the social stratification present at 1M that allows us to ground the importance of capital–wage-labour relations in a way that is consistent with ontological depth, structural change, intra-active (organic and) open totality and transformative agency (1993: 95–96).

Bhaskar's emphasis on agency and praxis and his concern with the struggle for liberation should be welcomed. But the way this is formulated will not stand up to the kind of rigorous social scientific analysis demanded at 1M. Indeed the relation between the kind of structuralist arguments at 1M (and in the earlier works) and Bhaskar's conceptualisation of praxis at 4D is not at all clear. Despite the attempts at systematisation, the main connections Bhaskar makes concern 4D praxis and 2E absence (the dialectic of absenting absences). The dominance of this combination perhaps accounts for the abstract universalism of Bhaskar's notion of praxis. Yet this abstract, universal notion of praxis comes to dominate Bhaskar's dialectic and to undermine notions of structure and stratification present at 1M. Because human agency is posed at the level of universal praxis, a scientific analysis of the structures and mechanisms that ground this practice gets left behind. Bhaskar does note how Marx's dialectic consists of an explanation of opposing forces, tendencies and principles in terms of a common causal ground and critiques of false or inadequate theories. But rather than focus on particular social relations, Bhaskar's DCR moves analysis towards transcendental universals:

> Dialectical critical realism argues that the Marxian goal in which 'the free development of each is a condition of the free development of all' can be achieved only by an extension, generalization and radicalization of Marx's dialectic of de-alienation into a dialectic of liberation from the totality of master–slave relations. (1993: 335)

By making this move, Marx's dialectic is deprived of any specificity and consequently we are denied the opportunity to identify those master–slave struggles most likely to bring about social change and those social structures most in need of changing.

The notion of dialectical universalisability runs from the negation of x to that which causes x to all similar constraints. Andrew Collier argues how this notion, when applied to freedom, becomes the Kantian idea that every action and desire implies a claim for freedom from constraint and hence commits us to a dialectic of universal freedom (1998b: 696). But, as he goes on to argue, freedom for some people is incompatible with freedom for others. Most obviously, the freedom to exploit others is not compatible with the freedom of the exploited. As Collier says, we have to decide whose and which freedoms – this does not mean total freedom for all, but the same freedom for all (1998b: 701). Therefore 'Human emancipation consists in the prioritisation and rationing of freedoms, not their indiscriminate affirmation' (1998b: 701).

There are two very dangerous trends in *Dialectic* that both threaten Marxist social theory. The first trend is that of systematisation as seen in the MELD scheme and the importance given to absence as an organising category. In this sense Bhaskar's *Dialectic* is more Hegelian than Marxian in piling one category upon another and bringing everything under its compass. Marxism gets swallowed up by dialectical critical realism. It becomes no more than a good illustration of an aspect of DCR. Such a move might be seen as a switch from critical realism's more humble philosophical role to that which conceives of (DCR) philosophy as the Queen of the Sciences. One of the most important of Bhaskar's insights is his recognition that political engagement necessarily flows from a social analysis, that impartiality is problematic and that philosophy has to take a critical stance. Unfortunately dialectical critical realism goes too far in attempting to provide its own critical politics instead of leaving these questions to a Marxist analysis. Dialectical critical realism represents an over-systematisation of philosophy that impinges on actual social science. And instead of developing the specific insights of a Marxist analysis, dialectical critical realism leaves us with a necessarily vague and general notion of human praxis that carries very little explanatory power when applied to concrete cases. Bhaskar would be the first to argue that every philosophy has an implicit politics. In the case of dialectical critical realism the lack of an explicit elaboration of (or connection to) a Marxist-based approach leaves a gap that is filled by a neo-Kantian or quasi-Habermasian universalism. This actually undermines a dialectic of freedom. It becomes trans-historical, teleological even, while the concept of freedom becomes virtually empty.

However, while this is certainly the threat to Marxism posed by *Dialectic*, it is not the only threat posed to Marxism by Bhaskar. For there is another trend in *Dialectic* which is the trend that was to be realised in

the work on meta-reality. That is the spiritual trend which is only just emerging, but which it is possible to spot in the notion of the pulse of freedom. For once we move to a transcendental universal notion of freedom as the absenting of constraints inherent in all human activity, then we no longer have the grounding in concrete social relations. In fact, if the starting point is the transcendental universal, then concrete social relations become no more than an irrealist categorical structure that we can shed. Thus we are already essentially free and the goal of life is to realise this by becoming what we already essentially are. The pulse of freedom now manifests itself as a dialectic of self-realisation and God-realisation where self-centred subjects flourish in selfless solidarity (Bhaskar 2000: 4).

Spiritual emancipation

This prepares us for the story of meta-reality; the outpouring of an exhausted but impatient theorist now turned to spiritual shortcuts to overcome the unhappiness of the real world. Bhaskar's meta-reality work accepts the social ontology outlined in his earlier work precisely in order to the shed it like unwanted clothing. Like the critical theorists before him, Bhaskar now sees the social ontology of critical realism almost wholly negatively as 'a world of duality: of unhappiness, oppression and strife … a world in which we are alienated from ourselves, each other, the activities in which we engage and the natural world we inhabit' (2002a: vii). The philosophical discourses of modernity are structured around egos, isolated atomistic individuals, set up against an object world that they manipulate through instrumental reason (2002a: 231). For Bhaskar, as for Horkheimer, the way out of this dilemma is a spiritual turn. In contrast to traditional Marxist approaches, the first step is not one of praxis, but one of contemplation. Through this we become aware that the alienated world in fact depends upon free, loving, creative, intelligent energy and that in becoming aware of this we begin the process of transforming the oppressive structures we have produced (2002a: vii–viii) (the solution perhaps to the Dialectic of Enlightenment). The world of oppression is therefore only a half-world or demi-reality that exists because a deeper level of truth is denied. And because it is us and not capitalism or some other social process that is responsible for this denial of our true natures, it is we who can solve the problem by realising this.

The social ontology outlined in the earlier works is now dismissed as 'demi-real' – for the oppressive structures we encounter come, not from a particular social system, but from something transcendent, that is to

say, our own selves and our fundamental errors in seeing such structures as constitutive of our social life (the error of duality) (2002a: xv). If in *Dialectic* the account of emancipation was overly optimistic – that we all have an interest in freedom and that we share with each other a basic solidarity which will ultimately overcome obstacles to human flourishing – in the meta-reality works, the project of emancipation becomes ridiculously banal. Bhaskar's argument is that there is a primary or essential level that is good, true and autonomous and a secondary or derivative level that is evil, false and oppressive. This secondary level comes to dominate the primary level on which it is dependent. The process of liberation therefore consists in the shedding of the secondary level (2002a: 52). Quite simply, 'all we have to do is shed everything which is inconsistent with our true, most essential nature' (2002a: 53).

Our true, essential nature is described as our ground-state. Emancipation becomes an act of self-realisation, where self-realisation is consistency with our ground-state. This, Bhaskar claims, is the basis of all emancipatory discourses, whether secular or religious (2002a: 323). But of course this is not a secular view, never mind anything remotely close to Marxism. It is straightforward (and very uninspiring) spiritualism as any good Buddhist will tell you, where, to identify with our transcendentally real ground-states, we must overcome our egos and shed our embodied personalities (i.e. what we are in the real world) to become ground-state beings connected to all others (2002a: 84).

Bhaskar occasionally invokes Marx – at his most utopian and humanist. If a communist society is where the free development of each is a condition for the free development of all, this means the jettisoning of ego and reaching consistency with our ground-state so that we become 'divine or realised man', the realisation of an embodied personality consistent with our ground-state (2002a: 348). We could be charitable to this view and reinterpret in terms of human nature. A reworked position would be that we take certain forms under certain social and material conditions but that these forms may not be our only possibilities. Rather, we have a deeper, more intrinsic human nature which is distinct from the nature we develop under particular conditions under different societies. Against those who would argue that human beings are intrinsically selfish we might object that this is only a particular expression of the nature of human beings under capitalist society and that the nature of human beings under particular conditions is different from human nature as a set of intrinsic capacities. In the old Bhaskar, what might be the capacities intrinsic to human nature would be synchronic emergent powers realised under particular material and social conditions. However, rather than seeing the nature of

humans under particular conditions as only one possible emergent form, Bhaskar now sees the 'demi-real' nature of human beings as something inconsistent with our 'true selves'. So Bhaskar is advocating an essentialist view of what we truly are, which is contrasted with what we are under a particular society. A Marxist-Aristotelian approach (consistent with Bhaskar's pre-spiritual work), by contrast, posits the idea of human realisation or flourishing where there is no true self as such, but the self as always only ever realised under particular social-material conditions. To change that self we have to change the particular social-material conditions. Then we may better be able to flourish. But we cannot flourish simply by 'shedding' such social-material conditions as if they were an illusion.

A number of positions that simply do not deserve debating emerge in meta-reality. Once material reality is accorded a secondary status to meta-reality, Bhaskar is then obliged to offer an anti-materialist, quasi-Spinozist claim that 'matter must be regarded as a *synchronic* emergent power of consciousness. … We have no grounds for supposing that all consciousness must presuppose matter whereas we have grounds for supposing that all matter is implicitly or explicitly conscious' (2002a: 21). We could continue with the arguments of meta-reality, but hopefully this is enough to convince the reader that this is not a worthwhile course. The real issues are how did this happen and how can we reclaim the realism of the earlier work? Here we need to go back to the wrong turn in *Dialectic*.

Once we move to a transcendentally universal notion of freedom as the absenting of constraints inherent in all human activity, then we move away from an analysis of actual social and material conditions (such as might be provided by Marxism) so that they inevitably become secondary to a philosophical / spiritual goal. These social relations are no longer constitutive of human beings and their activities, but are instead obstacles to the realisation of what we really are (or can be). *Dialectic* describes such conditions in terms of seeking universal human emancipation from unnecessary constraints. In fact, if these constraints are unnecessary, all we have to do is shed them. If the dialectic of freedom is constructed around something transcendentally universal, then concrete social relations become no more than an irrealist categorical structure that we get rid of.

The decidedly anti-materialist and anti-Marxist tone of the meta-reality work links the spiritual talk with the transcendental universalism of previous arguments.

> We are all the victims of master–slave relations; and contrary to the position of most emancipatory philosophies there is no unique

> privileged agent of change, neither an individual agency such as a political or religious leader [we might add philosopher to this list, JJ], nor some collective agency such as the working class or women or immigrants or lesbians or whatever. The minimum necessary unit for emancipation is the whole human race. (2002a: xxviii)

Of course, once emancipation is in the hands of everyone, it is in the hands of no one. It becomes unspecified, meaningless, vacuous. That this is so is because Bhaskar has abandoned the categories of 1M and the early critical realism. We no longer have social structures that determine the nature of emancipatory projects and the agents that might develop them. The move to dialectical universalisabilty in *Dialectic* prepares the way for the spiritual turn. The idea of a transcendental ground state is already there in *Dialectic*, it is just that here it takes the form of a dialectically universalisable freedom and transcendental solidarity.

Conclusion

Bhaskar makes it clear that he has moved beyond critical realism: 'these different moments of the philosophy of critical realism each reflect some aspect of the philosophy of Meta-Reality, which nevertheless, in transcending hitherto existing critical realism, re-totalises it in such a way as to merit a new name' (Bhaskar 2002b: 189). He writes that the 'philosophy of Meta-Reality … goes beyond hitherto existing critical realism … so that realism about transcendence leads into the transcendence of realism itself' (Bhaskar 2002b: 229). Critical realism is now critiqued alongside other philosophies for being a philosophy of duality that presupposes categories of non-identity. Actually, it is meta-reality that is a philosophy of duality hinging on the contrast between the primary and secondary levels. However, to radically separate the levels in this way is to posit a primary level that never exists, for to posit this level in its pure form is to embrace essentialism – an asocial, ahistorical, non-material state. Such a state never exists, what might be intrinsic can only ever be expressed under particular conditions that are social, cultural, historical and material. This is the idea of synchronic emergence posed by the earlier work of Bhaskar. Two different aspects can only ever exist through their combination – the realisation of deeper conditions through actual expression. Deeper, underlying properties and capacities are realised concretely, socially, historically, contingently. This position overcomes the appearance-essence dichotomy. To know these we must engage in concrete analysis of the type offered by Marxism and other

social theory. But Bhaskar's turn to meta-reality is in effect a turn made necessary by the abandonment of social explanation, a turn started in *Dialectic* with its transcendental univeralist philosophical claims about human nature, actions, desires, solidarity and struggle.

But let this chapter conclude positively by stressing the advantages of DCR and where this helps the critical realist project of the preceding works. *Dialectic* is a highly significant work, not at all comparable to the meta-reality writings. If its overall logic is flawed, its individual arguments are extremely insightful. *Dialectic* introduces a number of important new ways of framing things, notably the four planar social cube and the power1 power2 distinction that have been briefly discussed above. These do not have to lead in the direction of transcendental universality, rather, they can enrich our understanding of social ontology by highlighting its diversity.

The MELD distinction is also useful in drawing attention to different aspects of dialectics. But the development of this formula does not dialecticise critical realism, rather, it highlights and deepens the dialectical quality of existing critical realist arguments. The important if ultimately over-ambitious and overstated insistence on the significance of negativity is consistent with a lot of the insights of postructural and critical theory work, but goes beyond a critique of conceptions of the world to make bolder ontological claims. Problems flow from this, but the ontological focus is correct.

The issue of absence and negativity can perhaps be put another way that better incorporates this within the existing critical realist framework. The early critical realism argued against actualism or the focus on that which is actual or actualised at the expense of the underlying level of the real (structures and generative mechanisms). Putting this in new DCR terms we can say that the possible is bigger than the actual, that what is positively realised is just the tip of the iceberg, and what may not or does not happen is infinitely greater than which does happen. The level of the possible is a necessary ground for the level of the actual since underlying the actual is a whole set of intrinsic capacities, properties, processes and mechanisms which cannot be reduced to their exercise but exist, often unnoticed, as latent potentialities which are often only expressed as contingent outcomes that represent one among many such possibilities. The logic of this, in keeping with the earlier critical realism and a critical Marxism is that the struggle for freedom is also only expressed through a range of possibilities, not a single, universal, monovalent process, but a contingent set of possibilities that always take on particular conjunctural forms. This is freedom in the Marxist sense – a

struggle by a particular set of social agents acting under a particular set of social conditions (not of their choosing), in a particular conjuncture for a particular set of ends. Such a view is supported by the earlier form of critical realism. The pulse of freedom approach, by contrast, introduced a transcendentalism and universalism that acted against social specificity and paved the way for the idealism of meta-reality.

5

Agency and Dialectics: What Critical Realism Can Learn From Althusser's Marxism[1]

Kathryn Dean

This chapter focuses on the topic of human agency and emancipation from the point of view of a Marxist critical realism. In doing so, it sets out to correct the tendency towards theoretical ideology which, I argue, is present in Roy Bhaskar's work from *The Possibility of Naturalism* onwards (Bhaskar 1989a).[2] This tendency is manifested in the naturalisation of human agency as individual intentional and consequential action. It is a tendency which encourages neglect of the task of developing a philosophical anthropology in which a critical realist theory of emancipation can be grounded. The result is an a- or even anti-political account of human freedom. In what follows Bhaskar's philosophy of the experimental physical sciences (Bhaskar 1978) will be used as the basis of a philosophical anthropology capable of correcting the de-historicising, naturalising tendency which, in my view, marks his work. This philosophy is inadequate in itself, however, and will be found to need the theoretical nourishment provided by Althusser's work on the materialist dialectic and on ideology (Althusser 1990, 1984). The work on the materialist dialectic facilitates an understanding of the specificities of capitalist historicity and that on ideology enables us to grasp that historicity is within as well as outwith the human organism.

As an illustration of Bhaskar's naturalising tendency we can consider a recent interview with Mervyn Hartwig in the course of which Bhaskar describes as his 'abiding concern' the redefinition of 'a program for human liberation' (Bhaskar 2002d: 78). It becomes clear in the course of the interview that, for him, liberation is understandable in terms of the Aristotelian concept of eudaimonia, the latter being attainable as the expression or actualisation of love and creativity. For Bhaskar, these are human powers which can be activated through reconnecting with our 'ground-state', reconnection being a matter of individual recovery

of the reality of this ground-state. This formulation of the emancipatory task involves thinking away essential dimensions of emancipation in that it thinks away the constitutive power of 'appearances' (by which I mean here, directly encountered, everyday experiences). It is therefore a formulation which absolves the theorist from the essential task of explaining the cultivation of human powers, or, the constitution of subjectivity; in this case, of the understanding of conditions needed to render actual the human potential for love and creativity. These conditions are always necessarily relational and collective. It follows that emancipation can only be a relational-collective undertaking, something which Bhaskar's recent work tempts us to forget. As a means of developing a theoretical language more congruent with these relational realities of human life, Bhaskar's concept of love will be recast as sociability and his concept of imagination will be recast as rationality/knowledgeability in the following discussion of eudaimonia and human powers.

The implication of the foregoing is that there is a liberal-humanist dimension to Bhaskar's thinking in that he naturalises the liberal model of human agency, his statements regarding the historical character of human life to the contrary notwithstanding. He takes for granted the existence of the strongly intentional rational actor having the capabilities and socio-political power to translate intentions into consequential actions.[3] True, the actions may have unintended consequences, as when the individual shopper, intending to buy a Christmas present for a friend, contributes to a consequence – the reproduction of capitalism – which is not present in her reasons for shopping (Bhaskar 1989b: 79–80). But 'unintended consequences' has been the mechanism whereby methodological and ontological individualists from Weber onwards have attempted to reconcile the irreconcilable, namely, a belief in the independent powers of a pre-social individual confronted with evidence of the individual's necessary social and historico-cultural nature. While Bhaskar provides a critique of methodological individualism which is quite effective up to a point, his own attempt to transcend this individualism is flawed by its grounding in the ontologised distinction between 'people' and 'society' (1989a: 31–37, 1989b: 76): a distinction which expresses the naturalising tendency which is the focus of my critique.

In ontologising the 'people'/'society' or 'agency'/'structure' abstractions Bhaskar is, it will be argued, violating the nature of human nature in a way which leads him to posit an a- or even anti-political account of human freedom, since it leads him to conceptualise emancipation in terms of an individual exercise of will. Unlike some of my fellow-authors,

I see this depoliticising (because de-historicising, de-socialising) philosophical tendency to be present in Bhaskar's work from the beginning. It is a tendency which his dialectical turn might be expected to overcome (Bhaskar 1993). However, two crucial reductions can be cited as evidence that this overcoming has not taken place in *Dialectic*. First, is the reduction of the 'polyvalence of ontology' (the discovery of which is supposedly the book's major theoretical advance) to the highly abstract concept of absence.[4] Second, is the reduction of exploitation and oppression to the highly abstract model of the master–slave relation. Both of these reductions have the same implications as the conceptualisation of individual/ground-state nexus described briefly just now. That is, they imply the inconsequentiality of appearances as shapers of human subjectivity that is, of capabilities, dispositions and so on. Now, while we do not expect Bhaskar to do our history for us, we do need a philosophy which theorises the necessary historicity of human nature. Unfortunately, the concept of ontological polyvalence has so far proved inadequate to this necessary task.

If we are to understand the conditions of possibility for eudaimonia, we must theorise ontological polyvalence in terms of presence(s) as well as absence(s) and we must show through that theorising how the descent from the formalism of the trans-historical to historico-cultural substance can be effected. Humanity is ontologically polyvalent in the fundamental sense that it appears in radically different forms over time and across space. To neglect this necessary dimension of human life is to regress theoretically behind the great work of Marx's historical materialism. It is because Marx understood the need to inject historicity into philosophy in a way which recognised its sources within the specificities of the human organism that he established a philosophical distance from both idealism (which conceptualised historicity under the sign of Geist) and mechanical materialism (which ignored it altogether) and asserted the necessary sociality of human beings in his 'Theses on Feuerbach'. The historicity of human life requires us to develop a theoretical language which is sensitive to the specificities of modes of human life; to distinguish sharply between trans-historical and historical abstractions.

Unlike Bhaskar's critical realism, Marx's historical materialism, also oriented to the attainment of freedom as eudaimonia (Meikle 1985),[5] places the historicity of human life at the centre of its theoretical concerns (Marx and Engels 1976). It understands that human 'matter' is in motion in a particular way relating to its need to 'produce' rather than 'find' its means of subsistence. Producing involves the imposition of

form on both human and non-human nature via historico-culturally specific social relations. As Marx puts it, in relation to the forming of humans 'The *forming* of the five sense is a labour of the entire history of the world down to the present' (Marx 1977: 96). I use the anthropological concept of culture, rather than 'society', to connote this necessary activity.[6] The imposition of form is a matter of actualising particular causal powers (of both human and non-human nature) in particular ways. Marx provided an unsurpassed account of capitalism as an 'economy' having particular kinds of powers and needs and he indicated also the subject effects of the successful actualisation of these powers and satisfaction of these needs as in, for example, his account of atomism in 'On the Jewish Question' (1994). However, his treatment of human powers and needs is, compared to his work on capital, little more than a sketch. It is nevertheless a rich source of raw materials for those who come after him, as Sève makes clear (Sève 1978). Among the few western Marxists who have taken up the challenge is Althusser, who insists upon the historicity of human dispositions and capacities while at the same time assuming (although with markedly less optimism than Marx) the possibility and desirability of freedom as eudaimonia.[7] In insisting on the historicity of humanity, Althusser is, as was Marx, insisting upon the theoretical and political significance of 'appearances' or 'lived conditions'. It is through appearances or lived conditions that human powers are actualised (or not) in particular ways.

Althusser's work is intended to fill serious, politically disabling gaps in Marxist philosophy, therefore in Marxist social science. My argument is that it can perform a similar service for Bhaskarian critical realism. This service consists in first, the elaboration of a less formal, more historically sensitive account of dialectics than Bhaskar produces and second, and relatedly, a sketch of a philosophical anthropology which places the historicity of human nature at the centre of its concerns. It is worth signalling my disagreement with Joseph (102) who charges Althusser with reifying human agency. Far from this being the case, his work on ideology and his 'theoretical anti-humanism' should be read as a counter to the falsely and politically dangerous universalising tendencies of philosophical humanists such as Sartre (Althusser 1990c, 2003).

To remind the reader before proceeding, the point of the following discussion is to develop an understanding of freedom understood as eudaimonia, thereby clarifying the purpose of Bhaskar's critical realism (which is also, I am arguing, the purpose of Marx's and Althusser's Marxism). On the basis of this understanding, we can begin to theorise conditions of possibility for the actualisation of this condition thereby

developing the resources for judging the presence or absence of potentials for eudaimonia in the present. At a very abstract level it is true that, as Bhaskar says, eudaimonia is connected to the human potentials for love and creativity. However different cultures actualise love and creativity differently. Moreover, the potentials for love and creativity co-exist with the contradictory potentials for hatred and destructiveness. In what follows, I shall try to theorise beyond the trans-historical abstractions of love and creativity by considering the specificity of capitalist social relations – conceptualised as modes of cooperation borne by the division of labour – as actualisers of human potentials for sociability and rationality.[8] Regarding sociability it will be seen that in capitalist cultures the unprecedented consequentiality of impersonal mediations – of money and print – renders human sociability optional rather than necessary. Indeed, in its most strongly neoliberal manifestation, capitalism provides subjects with good reasons to behave in a- or even anti-social ways. The result is a depoliticising social poverty as I have argued elsewhere (Dean 2003). Regarding rationality, it will be argued that capitalism actualises the human potential for rationality in a myriad radically unequal modes. Its division of labour is such that it requires for its own reproduction the extremes of, on the one hand, strongly individualised intentional activity and, on the other, unthinking, habitual, docile behaviour. In fact, the necessity and prevalence of the impersonal mediations of money and print render possible a form of human activity which requires minimal social or cognitive engagement on the part of individuals. What this means is that even those who are charged with the most intellectually demanding and socially powerful forms of activity are cognitively immiserated in the sense that they do not have a clear understanding of the nature of their cultures *as a whole*. An understanding of the subject effects of these cultural characteristics is necessary if our talk of emancipation and eudaimonia is to have more than rhetorical significance.

I shall begin to unfold the argument to this effect by elaborating on the Aristotelian idea of freedom as eudaimonia which informs both Marxian historical materialism and Bhaskarian critical realism. What we find in Aristotle's work is an ontology of potentiality which stresses the importance of activity in the actualisation of human potentials. From this point of view eudaimonia is a condition of being which can be attained only through sustained and effortful activity generated by appropriate social relations. Following this return to Aristotle Bhaskar's early philosophy of the experimental natural sciences will be used as a resource for developing a philosophical anthropology grounded in an

Aristotelian ontology of potentiality. Here the concepts of lawfulness, the distinction between open and closed systems and between potential and actual will be adapted to the theorisation of the real nature of the human organism as a radically open system whose need for 'closure' is satisfied by (always historico-culturally specific) social relations. Finally I argue that Althusser's work on the materialist dialectic and on ideology enables the philosophical development of Bhaskar's key dialectical concepts of 'ontological polyvalence' and 'absence'. This work enables us to understand different modes of ontological polyvalence as manifested in capitalism and human nature and, through the linking of overdetermination and contradiction, enables a richer understanding of the complexities of absence than Bhaskar provides. It thereby enables us to begin to think about the potential (or absence thereof) for eudaimonia inhering in contemporary capitalist modes of life.

Eudaimonia

The concept of eudaimonia is underpinned by a philosophical anthropology which consists in an ontology of potentiality.[9] This stresses the centrality of appropriate activity to the actualisation of human powers and grounds the possibility of eudaimonia in the human potential for speech (Aristotle 1981: Bk. 1). As creatures capable of speech, humans possess potentials for deliberating on and judging what is good or bad, right or wrong. This distinguishes us from other animals who have voice, but not speech, who experience, and communicate their experience of, pain and pleasure, but who are incapable of deliberation and judgement. Speech then, and all that flows from it, is the human potential which holds the promise of eudaimonia, that happy state whereby humanity realises itself at the highest possible level of attainment. For Aristotle, this consists in citizenship, or, participation with one's peers in decision-making regarding the common good. Here happiness and freedom consist in collective public action undertaken by individuals who have been nurtured to undertake the action in question. This nurturing consists in the attainment of specific modes of sociability (friendship) and rationality (phronesis), on which more below.

From the Aristotelian point of view, eudaimonia is *the* human telos. It is the necessary destiny for creatures possessing the potentials associated with speech. It is important to note that necessity has here the force, not of what *will* necessarily be the case, but what, given a specific nature, *should* or *could* be the case. While it is the nature or telos of humans to attain eudaimonia, nature is here a kind of non-determining necessity

which may be subverted by accidents, or, it is a human potential which needs specific cultural conditions of possibility for its actualisation. For Aristotle, certain categories of person are either necessarily (women, slaves, barbarians) or accidentally (artisans, merchants) incapable of eudaimonia. Since Aristotle has identified the causal power of speech as the ground of eudaimonia, his arguments relating to necessary exclusions are wholly unconvincing although understandable in terms of the conventions of his time. These arguments have the character of theoretical ideology rather than critique that is, they are functional for the reproduction of specific and specifically unequal master–slave and gender relations. On this point it is essential to differentiate between the usefully sociological and uselessly ideological aspects of Aristotle's work.

Aristotle finds in the Greek polis the conditions whereby the male members of a particular class of property owners can actualise the powers which promise eudaimonia. These conditions include possession of the right kind of property (land and slaves to work it). This kind of ownership yields the leisure which is essential to the cultivation of those dispositions and capacities, or virtues, needed to enjoy freedom understood in eudaimonistic terms.[10] Unlike mercantile property, it is also such as to nurture individual propensity to cultivate these virtues. What renders mercantile property antithetical to the eudaimonic way of life is the preoccupation with accumulation which it necessarily promotes.

As noted before, the dispositions and capabilities in which the enjoyment of eudaimonia consists are understandable as specific internally related modes of sociability and rationality. Sociability is conceptualised as friendship, this being a political, therefore public, rather than private, relationship between citizens having the responsibility for care of the shared world (Aristotle 1976: Bk. 8). This is a responsibility which demands the cultivation of a particular manifestation of rationality, namely phronesis (Aristotle 1976: Bk. 6). What is involved here is a *practical* rationality consisting in the ability to make good judgements (about 'men' and circumstances) under complex and changing conditions (as opposed to, on the one hand, the *theoretical* rationality applicable to unchanging objects which produces scientific knowledge and, on the other, the *technical* rationality required for fabrication).[11] It is important to note here that phronesis is a form of rationality which is inherently and experientially social. It is so in the sense that it is acquired and practiced through face-to-face dialogical speech, in particular through the speech of deliberation with fellow-citizens concerned with care of the shared world. In this account of eudaimonia, the human

potentials for love and creativity are actualised as the public practices of citizenship.

The privileged individual with whom Aristotle is concerned attains a form of autonomy (self-rule) which is relative to a particular time, place, class and gender and which involves in a very literal sense, master–slave relations. Unlike the landowner who, as the master of slaves and the beneficiary of the best education available, has at his disposal those material and cultural resources needed for the development and practice of eudaimonia, those who must serve others, who are forced to engage in manual labour, or who engage in trade, are fated to live in a condition of unfreedom or enslavement (to the realm of necessity or to desires for the accumulation of property). Both the compulsion to engage in manual labour and the preoccupation with accumulating property leave individuals without the virtues needed to practice citizenship.

In short, eudaimonia is a form of freedom or individual autonomy which is essentially public in character but which has necessary private conditions of possibility. Freedom from want and from the need to work in the private sphere, combined with the appropriate use of the resulting leisure time, is the ground on which the freedom consisting in citizenship is practiced in the public sphere. Here the enjoyment of individual independence does not entail blindness to the unavoidability (and which does not hinder the enjoyment) of interdependence. In this case individual autonomy is cultivated in the midst of sociability. It is an autonomy which does not forget that autonomy is the gift of culture acting on human potential (Homiak 1993).

Bhaskar's philosophy of science as philosophical anthropology

What Aristotle is providing is a theory of eudaimonic freedom as freedom *with* rather than *from* other humans; a theory, moreover, which centres on the importance of human nurturing, grounded as it is in an ontology of potentiality.[12] This is a theory which stresses the class, gender and cultural specificity of human capacities, dispositions and skills; class, gender and cultural locations being here understood concretely rather than abstractly, or, understood in terms of the actual practices which particular positions entail and in which particular individuals engage.

We may wish to dismiss Aristotle's theory as grossly offensive to modern sensitivities and as in any case irrelevant because of its grounding of eudaimonia (as an actuality) in master–slave, as well as unequal gender

relations. By implication, Bhaskar, along with other theorists such as Marx and, more recently, Alasdair Macintyre (on whom see Chapter 2 by Wight) considers (or, at least, implies) that there is something to be gained from an engagement with Aristotle's work. What is to be gained, apart from an active, public-spirited conception of freedom, is an understanding of the centrality of cultural nurturing (immersion in determinate social relations) for the actualising of human potentials and, therefore, of the wrong-headedness of believing, as Bhaskar now apparently does, that humans *as individuals* can, by act of will alone, transcend their own particular nurturing.

Having set out Aristotle's understanding of the nature and possibility of eudaimonia, I shall now suggest how we might begin to develop a philosophical anthropology in which an argument about the desirability and possibility of eudaimonia might be grounded today. Development will be effected with the help of Bhaskar's philosophy of the experimental natural sciences. The return to Bhaskar's work on the natural sciences is prompted by the centrality which this work allocates to the distinction between potential and actual powers; a distinction which, unfortunately, Bhaskar fails to take up in relation to the question of human powers in his philosophy of the social sciences. The reconfiguration of Bhaskar's philosophy of natural science takes as its theoretical raw materials his treatment of the concept of lawfulness, his use of the distinctions between open and closed systems and, as noted earlier, between powers and their actualisation. Having set out an understanding of human beings as organisms having the character of radically open systems, and of culture as that which effects the necessary 'closure' of such systems, I shall use these concepts as a bridge to Althusser's work on the materialist dialectic (source of an account of the acutely dialectical, therefore historical-historicising, nature of capitalist cultures) and on ideology (theory of historicity of actualised, as opposed to potential, human powers).

As discussed in the introduction above, Bhaskar's philosophy is unfolded as a challenge to both 'positivism' and 'conventionalism'; a challenge which effects the synthesis of elements of both such as to bring lawfulness and intentionality (or causes and reasons) within one theoretical framework. Against positivism, Bhaskar argues that lawfulness is a matter not of predictable occurrences or 'constant conjunctions' but of causal powers which may or may not be actualised. Against conventionalism, Bhaskar argues that causal powers lawfulness is a reality which can (and does) resist transformation into 'conventions'.[13]

Most systems are open systems. In open systems powers are co-present with myriad others which may facilitate or negate their actualisation or

which may be indifferent to them. So, the concept of open system implies the possibility of non-actualisation of powers and the impossibility of predictability. The predictability which positivists take for granted is as often the result of deliberate human action as of unmediated non-human nature. The action in question is that which effects the closure of open systems, most importantly the closure of parts of nature effected by scientists in the laboratory. In the laboratory, particular natural causal powers are actualised by virtue of the manipulations of scientists. Through a combination of natural lawfulness (the lawfulness of causal powers) and of human intentional activity (itself an actualised human causal power) a certain kind of closure (predictability) becomes possible.

Here I want to adapt this synthesis (of 'causes' and 'reasons' as manifested in the activity of experimental scientists) to the understanding not of science but of the nature of human nature as a radically open, therefore indeterminate, system whose closure is effected through culture. Human natural openness inheres in the fact that we are not programmed to behave in predictable, narrowly constrained ways, or, our instincts do not provide us with clear, unambiguous messages about what to do. It will be useful here to have in mind the two conceptions of lawfulness discussed by Bhaskar: the lawfulness of causal powers (lawfulness A) and the lawfulness of regular recurrences (lawfulness B). As open systems, humans have a lawfuless of the former character, or a lawfulness consisting in potentials which may or may not be actualised. Beyond this, though, humans need lawfulness B if those powers are to be actualised. This is where culture comes in.

Culture is the non-determining necessity which transforms the radically open (indeterminate) newborn human organism into a particular subject who can function satisfactorily in a particular environment (Carrithers 1992; Woolfson 1982). We are in culture because we are in nature in a particular way (Leroi-Gurhan 1993). As radically open creatures (creatures who are 'instinctually incomplete') humans need to learn more, and differently, than any other animal. Such learning takes place (can only take place) via repeated experiences of determinate social relations, objects and activities. In the absence of these repeated experiences learning will not take place (Bruner 1974). It is culture which provides (or should provide[14]) the experiential stability needed for such learning. In short, culture in the sense in which it is used here is composed of a patterned, relatively stable set of social relations, practices and processes which are capable of reproducing a built habitat in which newborns can learn how to behave in ways which will ensure the

reproduction of both themselves and the culture on which they are vitally dependent.

As scientists manipulate non-human nature, culture manipulates both human and non-human nature. Both forms of manipulation are necessary for human life. Manipulation of non-human nature through the cultivation of crops, the domestication of animals and the harnessing of non-organic sources of power produces (or has produced in the past) the stable environment of regular recurrences in the absence of which humans cannot learn to be human. Within this stable environment culturally specific social relations constitute and reproduce the dispositions, capabilities and behaviours which are compatible with that environment. Through this two-fold manipulation culture translates human openness or indeterminacy into relative closure or relative determinacy.

Through cultures, human powers are actualised in appearances which vary over time and across space. In terms of our interest in agency, it is worth noting that cultures vary in their need for individually intentional, causally efficacious activity. In any case, such activity comes in many forms. For reasons which will be considered later, some cultures have minimal need for the kind of 'reflexivity' which has become a necessity in present-day capitalism (Beck *et al*. 1994) and all cultures necessarily 'teach' in a way which does not require the conscious co-operation of their members. Much, most, or sometimes all of the learning of speech, for example, goes on 'behind the back' of the learner.[15] This unself-conscious learning is a necessity which lays down individual dispositions and capabilities (or debilities or incapacities) long before the individual is capable of reflexivity (or, of the kind of self-consciously intentional thought and action which tends to be naturalised by Bhaskar). It is an imitative, non-reflexive form of learning through bodily activity (Bourdieu 1990) which nurtures what I describe elsewhere as a kinesthetic form of rationality (Dean 2003). In learning to speak, the individual child is also learning to become rational in a particular way, or, in a way which is not reducible to, and may not mature into, the reflexive form which prevails among those who function as intellectuals.[16]

Here is the fundamental point which is not wholly ignored but which, because it is inadequately conceptualised, tends to be forgotten in Bhaskar's work. Human capabilities are nurtured through the nurturing of bodies whose nature is such as to require culture. Culture is as much part of humanity as is our biology. In fact, it is because of humanity's particular biological form that culture is a necessity.

As non-human nature can resist or subvert culture's intentions so too can human nature. The difference is that human nature has been

culturally formed to act and react in particular ways, so it will always be resisting historico-culturally specific intentions in historico-culturally specific ways, contrary to what Bhaskar suggests through his use of the master–slave model of unfreedom/resistance. For this reason it is imperative that we take seriously both the specificity of modes of human nurturing (of subjectivation) and the profound consequentiality of culture as a causal power. This is the reality of human life to which we must attend if we are to develop our understanding of the conditions of possibility for the actualisation of the human potential for freedom – always freedom, *in* rather than *from*, culture. We need to understand what kinds of differences will make the difference needed to attain eudaimonia. On this question, historical materialism remains an indispensable theoretical and critical resource for critical realism (Roberts 2002).

However, historical materialism is itself prone to naturalising the historico-cultural in various ways and to developing a conceptual language which is on the one hand too remote from lived experience and, on the other, too close to the self-understanding of capitalism (Baudrillard 1975; Postone 1993). As noted earlier, we must understand the importance of class but we must do so in ways which are attentive to 'appearances' that is, to what is experienced by individual bodies, as well as to 'reality' that is, to what is beyond, but constitutive of, the experiences of individual bodies. To attend to appearances is to attend, in important part, to the specificities of the division of labour (Sayer, A. 1995: ch. 3). Here Althusser's work on the materialist dialectic and on ideology has been a necessary corrective to the a-historical abstractions of historical materialism itself.

From Bhaskar to Althusser: from system to totality

On the basis of a Bhaskarian philosophical anthropology, the nature of which has been sketched in the preceding section, we can begin to consider capitalism as a culture, or, from the point of view of its need to constitute subjectivities. As a culture, capitalism is more radically open than any other culture. Capitalism is radically open because its mode of lawfulness (the law of value) is such as to compel a particular and very peculiar division of labour through the compulsion to produce commodities, or, to make things (produce ideas, or provide services) which are exchangeable as well as usable. This compulsion sets in motion an expansionary, colonising dialectic of use and exchange which moves

more or less speedily and more or less erratically (Postone 1993). It institutes a division of labour or mode of cooperation which privatises sociability and de-individualises rationality and knowledge. Expressed otherwise, it nurtures blindness to the unavoidability of human interdependence by rendering sociability optional rather than necessary and it subsumes individual imaginative and cognitive activity under an impersonal 'system' (Gorz 1989; Kosik 1976). At the same time, the 'system' is such – contradictory, therefore crisis-ridden and unpredictable – as to have culturally unprecedented needs for novel forms of knowledge and activity.

It will be useful at this point to recall the distinction, outlined above, between lawfulness A (the lawfulness of causal powers) and lawfulness B (the lawfulness of regular recurrence). Lawfulness B is the lawfulness which culture imposes on the open human organism so as to effect its relative closure (or, the actualisation of its potentials in particular ways). In order to understand the peculiarities of capitalism's lawfulness as a manifestation of lawfulness B it is important to consider it from two points of view: from the point of view of capital as value (the 'objective' point of view) and from the point of view of the subjects of capital (the 'subjective' point of view).[17] Where capital successfully actualises itself as capitalism, or, it secures a lawfulness (lawfulness B) sufficient to the reproduction of value, we may say that it secures the regular recurrence of those practices and processes necessary for its own reproduction. However, lawfulness in this objective sense does not necessarily secure subjective lawfulness (relatively predictable conditions, or regularity of recurrence at the experiential level) such as cultures normally secure for their members. In fact, success in securing objective lawfulness B may result (has resulted) in the dissolution of subjective lawfulness B.[18]

Beyond this, though, the peculiarity of the law of value is that the more it is actualised the less likely are regular recurrences (either subjective or objective) to be found. Regularity of recurrence as an objective matter of the reproduction of value's law is secured only for the moment, and in a way which is bound to endanger this closure sooner or later (Harvey 1982, 2003). In fact, securing and sustaining objective lawfulness requires constant vigilance and extraordinary capacities for oversight and foresight, as well as periodic reconfigurations of activities (Aglietta 1998: 50; Arrighi 1994: 330).[19] Or, it places heavy subjective duties on the managers of capitalism as a whole. In effect, what we have is a peculiarly open culture which needs for its own reproduction subjects who are capable of culturally unprecedented degrees of reflexivity and of confidence that novel forms of intentional action will have the

desired kinds of consequences. Where it manages to satisfy this need, capitalism is actualising human powers in sociologically unprecedented ways. Whether or not it is doing so in a manner compatible with the attainment of eudaimonia is another question.

The peculiar openness of capitalist modes of life will now be explored in terms of the concept of 'totality'. Following Althusser, I am exploring capitalism as a totality so as to get at the specificities of capitalist modes of agency as modes of sociability and rationality since, as implied in the discussion of eudaimonia above, understanding these modes is key to understanding the possibilities or otherwise of attaining eudaimonic freedom.[20] Under capitalism commonsense knowledge is displaced by science and, relatedly, the individual intentionality of artisanal practices borne by face-to-face social relations is displaced by 'system'. A further change is that following the institution of industrial capitalism, periodic crises become a necessary rather than accidental part of life. These related displacements and what can be described as the normalisation of crisis are heavily consequential in terms of the constitution of subjectivities and forms of agency. They make heavy demands on human cognitive powers, but in a way which undermines the cognitive authority of individuals: they make very light demands on human sociability.[21]

To say that capitalism is a totality is to say that it possesses an acutely dialectical nature of the kind explored by Marx in terms of capitalism as 'economy' and by Althusser in terms of capitalism as 'culture'. As noted in the introduction, the capitalist division of labour involves the differentiation of an original unity into a totality. Whereas necessary social relations in a totalised culture are necessarily impersonally mediated (because separated in time and across space), those in unified cultures are coordinated personally through actually present, embodied, face-to-face social relations (more on this later).

As discussed in the introduction, Marx's work on the capitalist dialectic is directed largely at capitalism's crisis tendencies and at the specialised 'economic' practices of production, distribution and consumption. In this work, the concept of contradiction is favoured over that of 'absence'. In the Marxian account, contradictoriness is what makes absence(s) so heavily consequential in capitalist cultures and contradictoriness inheres in the spatio-temporal separations of necessary relations, practices and processes which promote the 'indifference' of these separated elements to one another. 'Indifference' expresses here a kind of 'objective' unawareness of necessary interdependence (i.e., between production, circulation and consumption of goods) which, beyond a certain point, results in crisis. Indifferent elements are elements which tend to absent themselves when

their presence is necessary for the reproduction of a given state of affairs. Here the dialectic is traced through the workings of capitalism's specialised economic practices and the specificity of these practices is brought out by Marx in terms of the contrast between the capitalist market (involving necessary commodified exchange) and pre-capitalist markets (involving voluntary non-commodified exchange) (Marx 1973: Introduction). This contrast will be discussed further below.

From Marx to Althusser: from economy to culture

Althusser's attempt to fill philosophical gaps in Marxism consists in rendering explicit and systematising what is present in a 'practical' sense in the work of Marx, namely, a dialectical historical materialist understanding of a dialectical world (Althusser 1990a: 174) and a philosophical anthropology which theorises the historicity of human nature. On the latter, his theoretical anti-humanism is intended as a reminder, addressed to Marxist social scientists, that human powers should not be taken for granted but, rather, require explicit, focused theoretical attention. His materialist dialectic is intended as a reminder that the base-superstructure metaphor is seriously misleading as a sketch of causality. Unlike Bhaskar, who claims that the Marxian dialectic is epistemological (Bhaskar 1993: 97), Althusser grasps that Marx's understanding and use of the dialectic is also ontological-relational (Althusser 1990b). It is this ontological-relational dimension of Marx's dialectic that Althusser begins to develop. In doing so he meets Joseph's criticism regarding the absence of 'ontological specificity' in 'much traditional Marxist dialectics' (108); an absence which also marks Bhaskar's dialectics, as noted earlier. As also noted before, an examination of Althusser's work on the materialist dialectic and on ideology will help us to develop Bhaskar's concept of 'ontological polyvalence' and to understand why that of contradiction should have primacy over absence.

Whereas Marx confines his discussion of the dialectic to those specialised activities which are labelled 'economic',[22] Althusser displaces the dialectic onto the totality of relations needed for the reproduction of social wholes. He does so for the purposes of counteracting the economism of the base-superstructure model of causality (1984a: 8–10)[23] which is seriously misleading in relation to the necessary character and function of those activities which have been allocated to the 'superstructure' by orthodox Marxists. In doing so he begins the development of a philosophy of causality which is (potentially at least) immeasurably superior to anything that has gone before.[24] He thereby remains true to and elaborates on Marx's post-Hegelian dialectics.

The major, but underdeveloped, development at the basis of this philosophy is the concept of overdetermination. This concept promises the elaboration of Marx's account of the 'concrete' as the 'unity of many determinations' and of the resulting dialectic of contradiction and indifference – in which inheres the normalisation of crisis – which characterises capitalist cultures. It is a dialectical rather than analytical concept that is, one which requires us to keep in mind the necessarily relational character of our objects of study. It is therefore fundamentally different from the conception of overdetermination discussed in mainstream philosophies of science (Mackie 1980). The dialectical causality of 'many determinations' is the causality pertaining between internally, necessarily related but spatio-temporally separated elements of the totality. The mark of this form of causality is the strong tendency towards causal failures; towards absence of the expected and/or the presence of the unexpected. The result is an open world of 'contradiction and overdetermination' (Althusser 1990b). Thus the concept of overdetermination is intended to overcome the deterministic linearity of the base-superstructure metaphor as well as the expressive essentialism of the Hegelian dialectic. It connotes a multiplicity of contradictory possibilities functioning at the level of the totality of capitalist practices rather than merely within the economy. So the concept displaces, as well as the base-superstructure metaphor, the 'very simple contradiction' between the forces and relations of production. We should not make assumptions about which contradictions (or combination of contradictions) will produce a crisis (Althusser 1990a: 113).[25]

It is worth noting in passing that this conception of overdetermination has interesting implications about the relationship between reality and appearances, as hinted at above. It directs our attention to the reality of interdependence combined with the appearance of independence. However, appearance in this sense is not merely an 'illusion' since it is a (temporarily) actualised, therefore consequential, condition involving determinate practices and processes.[26]

In displacing the dialectic from economy to culture, Althusser views the 'many determinations' which are necessarily present in totalities as determinations involving specialised practices of an economic, political and ideological kind (1990a). Practices are structured and relatively enduring activities which involve the imposition of particular kinds of form on particular kinds of raw materials. Or, as Althusser himself puts it, practices consist in the transformation of a 'determinate given raw material into a determinate *product*, a transformation effected by a determinate human labour, using determinate means (of "production")'

(1990a: 166). Economic practices are concerned with the transformation of natural raw materials into things which humans find useful, or, in the capitalist case, exchangeable/usable. Political practices are concerned with the reproduction/transformation of social relations. Ideological practices are concerned with subjectivation, or with the constitution and (re)constitution of those dispositions, capabilities and skills needed to reproduce/transform the culture. The remainder of this chapter will consist in an Althusserian analysis[27] of ideological practices in capitalist totalities to trace the connection between the dialectic and agency.[28]

Capitalism, dialectic and agency

The peculiarity of capitalist practices is that they are more radically differentiated, therefore contradictory, than any in human history. It is through the force of their contradictoriness, itself impelled by the need to realise ever-increasing amounts of surplus value, that capitalist cultures undergo continuous change. The resolution of crises requires reconfigurations of production, consumption and knowing, or, it requires the institution of new forms of subjectivity, of (in)capacities and (in)dispositions which are constituted by new kinds of practices. As Althusser's account of the materialist dialectic enables us to expand our understanding – gained from Marx's work – of crisis in capitalist cultures, and therefore, the necessity of effective forms of strongly intentional agency for the resolution thereof, his account of ideology enables us to develop further the philosophical anthropology derived from Bhaskar's philosophy of science.

As used by Althusser, ideology is a trans-historical abstraction which claims universal applicability. However, it makes its claim in a way which directs our attention to the necessary historicity of its 'essence' (Althusser 1990a: 166–167). We may say of ideology, as Althusser says so felicitously of contradiction (here echoing Marx's awareness of the necessary historicity of human life) that 'specificity universally appertains to [its] … essence' (1990a: 183). When Althusser claims that ideology is eternal he is restating in particularly provocative terms the claim made by theorists from Aristotle to Marx and beyond that human nature is such as to require the completion of culture.[29] He is attempting to theorise the particularity of human nature as an 'open system', to use the terminology adopted in the second part of this chapter. Ideology is the *sine qua non* of the emergence, out of the newborn individual human organism, of a subject who knows how to 'go on' under given conditions. As such it 'is identical with the "lived" experience of human existence itself'

(Althusser 1984b: 175). It is primarily a matter of daily practices by means of which particular modes of subjectivity (or 'consciousness') are constituted. It may or may not be the case that taken-for-granted practices become the object of reflection, or, become understood through 'representations' of (in the form of propositional statements about) these practices (that 'consciousness' becomes the object of self-conscious evaluation). Althusser's purpose is to undermine the taken-for-grantedness of capitalist forms of subjectivity so as to encourage, against the reformism of 'socialist humanism', a truly critical and revolutionary self-consciousness on the part of Marxist theorists.

While ideology is universal or trans-historical in the sense that it is a necessity for the human organism at all times and in all places, it is always manifested in the plural, as it were. For Althusser, humanism is a capitalist ideology which naturalises/universalises an historico-culturally specific mode of subjectivation; one which is, moreover, compatible with the needs of capitalism. On the question of humanism, what I interpret Althusser to be saying (what makes his 'theoretical anti-humanism' of direct, even urgent, relevance to critical realism) is that given where we want to go humanism is not the theoretical place from which we should start (Althusser 2003: 221–305; Collier 1989: ch. 3). Or, Althusser is not rejecting the possibility of emancipation. Rather, he wants us to understand the difficulties of its attainment by understanding the 'openness' of human nature and therefore the centrality of the forms which effect its relative closure. It is because of this openness that subjects are always necessarily 'in' rather than 'of' history (1984c). As beings in history subjects are always, in a significant and unavoidable way, acting 'on behalf of' a particular culture which has a particular repertoire of social relations, practices and processes the reproduction of which it is their task to undertake. For this reason, it is vital to attend to the nature of the 'history' within which subjects are acting.

The relationship between dialectic and agency is noted but not elaborated in any detail in Althusser's own work (no more than 'notes' as he himself points out at the start of the ISAs essay).[30] However, the logic of Althusser's account of the materialist dialectic is that as an acutely contradictory culture capitalism has a culturally unprecedented need of novel forms of agency. Capitalist forms of agency are different in character and more various than those found in pre-capitalist cultures. They are different in that they involve the transformation rather than reproduction of existing repertoires of action. What this means is that capitalism is impelled to transform rather than reproduce modes of subjectivity if it is to reproduce itself. We can elaborate on this point with

the help of a simple depiction of 'before' and 'after' the institution of capitalist industrialisation.

It is important to note that the following analysis assumes – for the purpose of understanding the cultural distinctiveness of capitalism – a clear difference between particular markets consisting in the voluntary exchange of useful objects and the abstract capitalist market consisting in the necessary exchange of objects which have been produced as commodities. Particular, pre-capitalist markets are composed of an experiential unity of face-to-face exchange of items which have been produced by individual parties to the act of exchange.[31] Here buying and selling constitute one directly experienced activity engaged in by the direct producers/exchangers of the goods being exchanged. Buyer is also seller, seller is also buyer: buyer is also producer or maker, as is seller. Moreover buying and selling take place only if a complementary usefulness exists. In short, supply and demand are regulated through the direct experience of participants in the act of exchange. The social relations are relations between equals who have an equal cognitive grasp of the context and who are required to exercise sociability in the act of exchange. What is in question is individual causally efficacious intentionality functioning through necessarily sociable social relations. Since exchange is voluntary rather than necessary to the reproduction of the mode of life, failure of exchange does not result in crisis (Marx 1951: 368–414).

Another way of making this point about the non-necessity of crisis in pre-capitalist cultures is to say that in these cultures the dialectic moved very slowly, or, it was experientially inconsequential. Crises, when they occurred, were due to natural disasters or to invasions and wars. Reproductive failures were attributed to nature, or God's punishment, or to the evil doings of enemies. They were not conceived of as crises which arose necessarily from the nature of the mode of producing life's necessities so they were not crises which required the kind of fundamental rethinking of practices that capitalism normally requires. Specialists in 'stopping to think' (intellectuals) were not required so, as Althusser notes (1984a: 6), the learning involved in the cultivation of useful skills took place 'on the job'. In these cases, the individual apprentice was introduced at an early age into a more or less regulated, more or less complex, network of personal social relations and was required to learn 'how to go on' as an artisan through copying a master. Learning was absorbed through the bodily activity of mimesis, or, it involved a kinesthetic form of rationality, the rationality implicated in 'knowing how' (common sense) rather than 'knowing that' (science) (Ryle 1968: 28–32). As such it constituted an experience of reproducing rather than

transforming the repertoire of practices in question. Yes, the particular activities involved the transformation of nature (of timber into a table, of grain into flour and bread, of wool into cloth and coats), but it did not involve the transformation of the transforming activities. These were transmitted inter-generationally via individualised personal social relations.This is a vital matter. In pre-capitalist cultures individual subjects could be highly skilled and could have, as individuals, a control of their raw materials and a mastery of the form which was to be imposed on those raw materials superior to anything found in the capitalist world (Dickens 1996: ch. 1, esp. 44–49). In this sense, meaningful intentional human agency was actualised. At the same time there was little or no choice of occupation. Intentionality was possible within a narrow range of activities. It was rarely possible to exercise intentionality in relation to the choice of occupation. Yet the prevalence of production based on the use of tools meant that individual workers had, in many ways, a stronger sense of self and a more authentic experience of autonomy in the occupational sphere than would subjects constituted by industrialised practices.[32]

Once the spatio-temporal separation of necessary practices and processes – practices and processes which were essential for the reproduction of everyday life – was effected, the untheoretical, taken-for-granted knowledge embodied in common sense became increasingly inadequate to cultural reproduction. Action-at-a-distance, ever longer chains of dependencies, became part of the normal mode of functioning of cultures which were subsumed under capitalism.[33] What this meant in experiential terms is that individuals became subjected increasingly to the absence of the expected and the presence of the unexpected. In Bhaskarian terms, lawfulness B (the lawfulness of regular recurrence) was breaking down. Or, the emergent division of labour necessitated by the law of value was coming to dissolve experiential regularity and predictability (subjective lawfulness B). The habitual closure which cultures had provided for their members in the past ('acts of God', wars, famines or other natural disasters permitting) was no longer available. Now rather than drawing on common sense, (some) individuals were required to 'stop and think' before taking action; they were required to actualise their rationality in new ways.[34] As I have argued elsewhere, this actualisation placed heavy duties of self-development on the emergent bourgeois class (or, at least, its male members) (Dean 2003: pt. 2). At the same time, it deprived artisans and peasants of the relative autonomy which possession and mastery of tools and/or land, and of consequential technical knowledge had conferred on these classes in a non-capitalist world.

The emergent capitalist division of labour required unprecedented discipline. This discipline was 'self-imposed' through reflexivity in the case of the bourgeoisie, whose members were required to 'do the right thing' 'all by themselves' (who were constituted 'as if' they were autonomous). It was systemically imposed through (often strongly resisted) habituation in the case of the proletariat, whose members were required to do no more than behave in stimulus/response mode.[35] Doing the right (functional) thing could not be determined in formulaic or commonsense terms, but required, from those destined to be professional intellectuals, capabilities to exercise hindsight and foresight, to make judgements under novel and increasingly complex conditions, and from those destined to be proletarians, the willingness to adapt themselves unquestioningly to these judgements (Doray 1988; Gorz 1989; Kosik 1976). Towards the end of the nineteenth century, the imperative to 'stop and think' became instituted in a complex system of disciplines (Manicas 1988: ch. 10). From now on, the reproduction of competent 'labour power' is achieved more and more through systems of institutional differentiation and formal education rather than 'on the job' (Gramsci 1971: pt. 1).[36] In other words, the task of reproduction/transformation of dispositions, capacities and skills is subject to a division of labour which consists in the proliferation of specialists of myriad kinds, hence the possibility of individual intentionality in relation to occupational choice, and its necessity given particular occupational choices – or the apparent loosening of the power of the given through the injection of choice into givenness.

In short, intellectuals will have received a bureaucratically mediated specialised education conducted at a distance from the theoretically constituted technical activities for the design and/or management of which the education is a preparation. Proletarians, who are required to be nothing but docile 'bearers of structures', will have received little beyond a very basic formal education for minimal literacy and numeracy. They will not have been given the nurturing needed for the practice of reflexive intentional agency.[37]

Under capitalism, the need to transform in order to reproduce is related to the need to resolve crises arising from the culture's contradictory tendencies and to expand value's law into new domains (new places, new objects, new practices, new relations). Expansion is implicated in the complex and always-changing division of labour which enhances contradictoriness and crises in the way discussed earlier. The resolution of crises takes place on the basis of well thought-out collective action which becomes possible only on the basis of novel kinds of education

and experiences, that is, education and experiences intended to nurture theoretical or scientific intelligences and abilities. In this lies the connection between the dialectic and agency.

Social theorists such as Ulrich Beck and Anthony Giddens have discussed and tended to celebrate this development in terms of 'reflexivity' (Beck *et al*. 1994). In doing so they have neglected the debilitating aspects of capitalist forms of subjectivity associated with the cognitive and a-social constraints which these forms necessarily bring with them. Here I can do no more than suggest the nature of these constraints which are associated with the prevalence of impersonal mediations – money and print – necessitated by the capitalist division of labour.

Money, print and the reification of social relations

Money and print are mediations which allow a form of cultural reproduction which requires minimal cognitive or social engagement on the part of individuals. Indeed as dimensions of subject-constitutive practices, money and print are necessary for (but do not necessarily eventuate in) the reification of social relations and the atomisation of subjectivity.[38] Specifically, both money and print are necessary for the impersonal mode of relationship which characterises employer/employee interactions and for the emergence of modern bureaucracy as an impersonal hierarchy of positions. As providers of welfare to clients, bureaucracies reconfigure interdependence as individual dependence on an impersonal apparatus. More generally, money enables us to act effectively (in individual and systemic terms) on the basis of minimal knowledge and understanding (Dodd 1994). In this sense, money permits cultural reproduction on the basis of minimal individual understanding of the culture in question. In requiring minimal sociability money secretes the tendency towards atomism. Atomistic subjects are subjects whose culture enables the experience of freedom from personal dependence through the reification of social relations effected by impersonal mediations. Here freedom from personal dependence is secured at the cost of dependence on a system of impersonal social relations (the experience connoted by the concept 'bearer of structures'), an understanding of which is unnecessary for the (thoughtless) conduct of everyday life.

The concepts 'system' and 'bearers of structures' connote not only the reality and experience of impersonal social relations but also the cognitive opacity (at the level of individual subjects) of the capitalist totality.[39] This cognitive opacity renders it impossible for individuals to map their places accurately in the totality of relations and practices which are

needed for the reproduction of their own way of life.[40] This tends to be the case even where reflexivity is highly developed. So, despite capitalism's need for individualised intentional action, it is important to retain the idea that individual subjects are, under capitalism, necessarily bearers of structures in the dual sense that the capitalist division of labour is mediated impersonally and that it dissolves the relative autonomy which possession of land and/or tools and artisanal mastery had constituted for pre-capitalist subjects.

Conclusion

The purpose of this chapter has been to contribute to our understanding of human agency and emancipation by correcting the tendency towards ideological theorising which is to be found in Bhaskarian critical realism. Ideological theorising is manifested in Bhaskar's work in the strong tendency to naturalise individual intentional action by minimising the consequentiality of culture. This tendency encourages neglect of several important tasks which need to be undertaken if critical realism's promotion of emancipation is to be meaningful. These tasks include the following: an understanding of the conditions needed to nurture human capabilities and of the centrality of communal, rather than merely individual, action; the making of good arguments regarding the nature of freedom as eudaimonia and the identification of (possible) potentials for the actualisation of eudaimonia in contemporary capitalist cultures.

We need to be clear that intentionality and eudaimonia are human potentials which need cultural conditions of possibility for their actualisation. Intentionality may or may not be cultivated or it may be cultivated (as is the case in contemporary life) in ways which are incompatible with the eudaimonistic virtues desired by Bhaskar. As I have argued elsewhere, modes of capitalism have more or less need of apparently self-directing forms of subjectivity (Dean 2003). Mass industrial, 'organised' capitalism required that proletarian individuals be reduced to 'bearers of structures' in the very fundamental sense that they become appendages of machines whereas contemporary 'disorganised' capitalism (at least in Euro-America) has less need of such appendages.[41] As appendages of machines, individuals are not required to exercise intentionality or to become highly skilled. Rather they are to adapt themselves in an unquestioning manner to a process the real nature of which remains inaccessible to them through their everyday experience. This need to adapt to systemic requirements is most powerfully expressed in the

activity of machine-minder. Yet the logic of adaptability is also lived in some of the most freely chosen individuated activities. Bhaskar's example of Christmas shopping is relevant here. As noted earlier, the individual Christmas shopper is, behind her own back, reproducing the reality which makes her shopping activity necessary. Bhaskar is clear about the 'unintended consequences' of the shopper's activities. Unfortunately he appears to be unaware of the need to explore the ways in which the disposition to shop (beyond necessity) is nurtured, as well as, most importantly, the nature of this disposition. The practice of shopping is one which requires the impersonal mediation of money and which can therefore be engaged in with minimal knowledge and minimal exercise of sociability. Shopping is an appearance which promotes a narrowly privatised instrumental rationality and atomism. These are the antitheses of the virtues – associated with phronesis and friendship – required for the enjoyment of eudaimonic freedom.

It is because we are incomplete, because our instincts do not dictate our behaviour, that 'appearances' have such grave consequentiality in human life. Contemporary capitalist appearances are tending to constitute individuals as atomistic subjects of the kind discussed by Marx in 'On the Jewish Question'. From a Marxian-Althusserian point of view we can agree that atomism is an 'ideological delusion' (Bhaskar 2002d: 69). However, atomism is not only a delusion but a lived condition, or appearance, constituted by capitalist social relations in societies from which pre-capitalist survivals have disappeared. Of course, it is a delusion in relation to the reality of human interdependence and interconnectedness. However, as appearance (an illusion embodied in everyday practices) it is constitutive of one, capitalist-specific mode of human being in the world. Unfortunately, while Bhaskar registers his recognition of the centrality of practices to the nature of human nature (ibid.: 90) he forgets about this when he writes off the illusion of atomism as a relatively inconsequential 'delusion'. Here, as elsewhere, we can note in Bhaskar's work a regrettable readiness to dismiss appearances as inconsequential.

In asserting the centrality of 'understanding' or interpretation, Bhaskar is simultaneously asserting the importance of appearances. Unfortunately he does not theorise this importance in relation to the constitution of subjectivity, therefore of forms of human agency. In fact, there is a tendency among realists (whether Marxist or Bhaskarian) to neglect appearances in favour of reality. In the case of Marxists, this is expressed in the imposition of the abstraction 'class' onto the complex diversity of everyday experiences; in the case of Bhaskar, it is expressed in the belief that individuals can transcend with apparent ease the

effects of everyday experiences. Correction of this tendency requires the reconceptualisation of the reality/appearance and potential/actual distinctions as part of a critical philosophical anthropology; one which will enhance rather than diminish the radical character of critical theory. This task has been undertaken with the help of Bhaskar's philosophy of the experimental sciences and Althusser's philosophy of dialectics and ideology. The task is one of providing a critical philosophical anthropology dedicated to the theorisation of human potentials needed to support the goal of eudaimonia.

6
Conclusion: Debating the Issues

Kathryn Dean, Jonathan Joseph, John Michael Roberts and Colin Wight

In this conclusion we have decided to use a debating technique to explore points of convergence and difference. During the course of writing this book, we have found more differences between us than we were expecting to find. What brought us together was an interest in critical realist philosophy and above all a serious concern with its current development. We wished to put down in print the need to defend some of the ideas of critical realism while strongly rejecting most of the recent work (of Roy Bhaskar in particular). Indeed our initial plan was to call this book *Reclaiming Realism*. The aim was to set out what is useful in this tradition while criticising more recent work. The problem is that taking such an approach can end up with a narrowly defined project. We wanted to show the usefulness of a critical realist approach by relating it to broader issues in social science, and to Marxist ideas in particular.

It was very easy for us to agree on such a project, but it proved much more difficult for us to carry this out in unison. A number of keenly felt differences emerged between us, something which is reflected in this conclusion. We hope, however, that this proves to be a strength of the book. In our view, our differences over such things as historicity, structure and agency and the relation between philosophy and social science indicate the huge importance of these issues, and the need to debate them further. Thus we write this concluding exchange with the aim, not of flagging up differences between us, but of highlighting what we think are areas in need of serious consideration. We hope, in its own small way, this book can contribute to discussions between critical realists and between social scientists and philosophers more generally. We soon came to the conclusion that it was not worth engaging in a sustained critique of Roy Bhaskar's latest work. We hope instead, that our discussions

here can point others in the direction of what is still living, rather than dead, in the critical realist approach.

I begin then with a question to John Roberts. I have a lot of sympathy for John's chapter, particularly his concern that many critical realists develop their analytical rigour without recourse to Marx. Certainly I support his emphasis on particular social and historical form. However, while I agree that critical realists have to be fully aware of the social and historical nature of the object of study, I do not think this is something that can be achieved simply by injecting a dose of history into the philosophy of critical realism. John adds to the domains of the empirical, actual and real, the domain of the historical represented by refracted social forms. This I do not agree with. For I think that if particular approaches to social science fail to sufficiently address social and historical form, then this is a problem with the approaches, not with critical realism per se. Indeed, by adding a historical domain, the opposite effect is achieved, for it ends up de-historicising the other three domains. So rather than adding a historical domain to the existing three domains, I think the issue here is to insist on the historicity of all three domains. Just as I have argued that we should not see the 'dialectical turn' as adding dialectics to critical realism for the reason that critical realism was already dialectical in nature, so I do not think that we need a historical turn to add history to critical realism. Critical realism, if it is good critical realism, should already have an understanding of historical form built into it. Otherwise it becomes very difficult indeed to understand or elaborate upon what critical realists mean by the contingent domains of the empirical or the actual, or the underlying structural nature of the real.

I think that the degree of historicity of an object varies according to what it is we are looking at (the natural world is clearly less historicised than the social world). I would certainly agree with John that Marxists would be better able to analyse the social world using critical realist methods due to their emphasis on historicity. But I think this is more a question of how one uses critical realism to elaborate a social ontology. Marxist approaches are better able to do this than non-Marxist approaches. The question is not so much what type of critical realism to have, but what type of approach to social science to have – or what type of relationship to have between critical realism and Marxism.

John Michael Roberts

I agree with Jonathan's observation that critical realism should already have a historical approach built into its theoretical framework. Indeed,

as I indicated in my chapter, many critical realists do take 'history' seriously by highlighting the historical mediation of social structures and agency. So my point is not to argue that critical realism cannot incorporate history within its insights, even if, as is the case, not many critical realists do in fact do this. Rather my point is that even if critical realism does have an understanding of historical form built into, as Jonathan suggests, it is crucial to comprehend what sort of historical analysis is being used here. Certainly critical realism can offer some perceptive insights on how, for example, societies undergo transformation through distinct transitions. It can do this by exploring how the causal powers of specific social structures interact with one another and interact with intentional and unintentional human agency and how this complex interaction produces historical change. But we must be clear about some of the theoretical problems that such an approach might encourage for historical analysis. In historical sociology there is already a well-established approach that owes more to Weber than to Marx that examines history in this manner (e.g., Mann 1986; Runciman 1983, 1989). But this strand of historical sociology tends to view for example, social structures as distinctive entities that interact with one another externally. In addition this approach tends to give equal theoretical weight to each social structure. Under these conditions it is hard to see how social structures are internally related to one another through a specific set of historical determinations.

Again as I indicated in my chapter, historical determinations are, I think, best viewed through a Marxist framework as a set of contradictions between forces of production and relations of production. These contradictions assume a specific form within specific historical systems. By viewing history as a set of contradictions in this manner we are able to isolate the most abstract and simple determinations of a historical system without prejudging the more concrete historical form that those determinations will assume in time and place. This allows us some flexibility in developing new concepts to account for the more concrete historical form that these internal contradictions and determinations assume. And, unlike a Weberian approach to history, there is no need to say that a particular period in history must, of necessity, be determined by a combination of specific social structures and human agency. For example, Marxism would not want to argue that capitalism must of necessity arise within urban towns, individualism or through formally democratic political structures associated with a nation-state. Rather, by isolating the most abstract contradictions and determinations of a historical system, Marxism argues that historical systems often arise and

persist through what seem to be previous historical systems. Many capitalist systems, for example, have emerged and persisted through what seem at first to be feudal social relations.

Now, I am not suggesting that critical realism necessarily adopts this Weberian approach to history in every instance. But I am suggesting that the type of critical realism that neglects Marxism has a strong propensity to adopt a Weberian approach because many theoretical concerns of critical realism, especially that of structure and agency, fit comfortably within Weberian sociology. Therefore when I 'add' a historical domain to critical realism I am doing so in order to bring the stratified concept of reality, as advocated by critical realism, more readily within the theoretical remit of Marxism. The benefits for both are, I hope, ready to see. For critical realism there are the benefits to be gained from both a systematic dialectical approach and a social form analysis to the study of society. For Marxism there are the benefits to be gained from the work around mechanisms and the contradictory ideological social forms they either support or inhibit. Therefore I would hope that the 'fourth domain' to critical realism is not conceived simply as being 'one extra' level to the stratified view of the world. I would want to make the stronger claim that the historical domain mediates the other three domains and is therefore the most important level of the material world.

JJ

I see this reply as supporting my point rather than countering it. That is to say, your problem is not (or should not be) with critical realism as such, but with particular critical realists – or with particular usages and applications of critical realism. Instead of saying what it is that is wrong with critical realism as such, you criticise critical realists before criticising Weberians. I do not have any problems with you criticising these approaches – as a Marxist it is a concern that I share. But I think the legitimate targets of your critique are those social scientists that practice critical realism, not critical realism itself.

JMR

You say that the problem is not with critical realism as such, but with critical realists. I'm not so sure that this is the case. In the first instance, how do we define critical realism? In the vast majority of cases critical realism is defined in general through Bhaskar's breakthrough book, *A Realist Theory of Science*. That is to say, critical realists take this book as the starting point for saying what the basic characteristics of critical realism are. As we know, however, *A Realist Theory* has very little to say about

Marxism and the concepts associated with Marxism such as historical materialism, dialectics, social form, and so on. Now, Bhaskar was obviously working at a transcendental level of theory in that book, and he admits that his ideas should be seen in the guise of being an underlabourer for helping to sort out problems that might occur in other fields of social theory. Be this as it may, Bhaskar still could have included concepts like dialectics within the remit of his underlabouring scheme of things in *A Realist Theory*, just as Hegel had done in *A Science of Logic*, but Bhaskar does not do this. In fact he only starts to address dialectics in later works, culminating with his own take on dialectical theory in *Dialectic: The Pulse of Freedom*. Therefore, the starting point for what most people would take to be the founding text of critical realism is one that certainly has affinities with Marxism, but it is also one that is not Marxist in the strict sense of that term. Clearly, subsequent theorists have made the links between critical realism and Marxism more explicit, and as noted Bhaskar has helped greatly in this, but it is also the case that many other subsequent critical realists have clouded over the links with Marxism. As a result of this latter movement there is now a form of critical realism that sees itself as a social theory in its own right, thereby relinquishing its underlabourer status. What I would like to say, then, is that I am concerned from a Marxist perspective of the limits of critical realism. I do not believe, as I think you seem to, that even as an underlabourer philosophy critical realism can simply be assimilated to Marxism.

Kathryn Dean

First, I want to ask Jonathan how historicity is built into critical realism? Marxism offers us the 'mechanism' of contradiction allied to an historicised philosophical anthropology (however poorly the latter is developed). Can you point to an equivalently powerful mechanism in pre-dialectical CR? In his dialectics, Bhaskar displaces contradiction by absence and provides an 'inventory' of 'various dialectical nut-pieces' as Collier puts it, rather than a theory of history. The movement of the dialectic appears to depend on a universal 'dialectic of desire'.

Regarding John's point that 'many critical realists take history seriously by highlighting the historical mediation of social structures and agency', it is worth noting that Archer's treatment of history appears to consist in conceiving of 'structure' as the accumulated result of the combined activities of previous generations. This way of injecting historicity into 'structure' is compatible with a Weberian position, as John goes on to

suggest. I would want to add that this Weberian dimension is not at all at odds with the theoretical spirit of the TMSA.

This leads me to my final point which is that I do not see how we can divorce critical realism from critical realists.

JJ

I think my position is being slightly misunderstood so I will try and clarify it here. I am not trying to assimilate critical realism as Marxism. My attraction to the philosophy of CR is precisely that it is not Marxism. My primary concern is with the development of Marxist theory and the overcoming of some of its weaknesses. I have been troubled by the various philosophical stances that Marxism itself has taken – veering from determinism to voluntarism, from structuralism to intersubjectivity, from scientism to humanism and from one teleological view of history to another. My attraction to CR then, is precisely that it is not Marxism. If we are to subject some of Marxism's claims to critical scrutiny, then we need something that stands outside Marxism that is distinct and critical. This is what interests me in the underlabouring role of CR as well as the various ontological claims that it helps to make. At the same time, I do not want something that is at odds with Marxism or which tramples all over it as Bhaskar's later work tends to do. So I am interested in the compatibility of the two approaches, not in their merger. For this reason, it is a strength of RTS that it is pitched at the wider field of the sciences in general. For me, this provides a much more stable starting point to then move in and look at the claims Marxism makes as a particular science. What has to be made explicit is that critical realism cannot simply be applied directly. It has to work alongside Marxism if we are to understand the social world. But the claims of Marxism cannot escape critical scrutiny and I find the early CR best at doing this.

To answer Kathryn's point, I would argue that distinctions like that between the empirical, actual and real have to be understood as historical if they are to be of any use to Marxism. I would argue that such a distinction is just as implicitly historical as any notion of Marxist dialectics is. But historicity is not something that should be artificially injected into the philosophy, but rather, is something that comes out in the working-through. The actual has to be seen as a domain of events that are conjunctural. These are produced by longer-term historical processes. The notion of underlying structures is implicitly historical once we see them as relatively enduring over time and reproduced and occasionally transformed by human action. I think that this deeper level

has many overlapping structures each turning over at different speeds or tempo. In this structural-historical sense, we are talking of what Braudel would call the *longue durée*. The actual is the domain where these different processes (structures and mechanisms) come together. It is structurally produced, but historical in the sense of being conjunctual and contingent, open to many outcomes. This may not be the way that Bhaskar talks about this distinction, but I think it is inevitable that we start to think in these terms once we start to apply his model to historical questions (see Joseph 2002: 34–35, 163–164; Morera 1990: 91).

So the answer to both of you on critical realism and critical realists is that some critical realists will interpret Bhaskar's distinction in this way and some will not. The distinction is a good starting point precisely because it does lend itself to this kind of interpretation. The problem lies not with critical realism itself, but with those who do not interpret it historically. Finally, I would argue that reading through what is implicit in the earlier work is far more rewarding (regardless of whether we find the term Marxism in the pages) than trying to work through the muddles of Bhaksar's later, more explicit claims in relation to Marxism and dialectics.

Colin Wight

I would like to contribute something here. First, I find John's position puzzling, both in relation to the more general claims about CR, and about the specific claims made in respect of historical specificity. However, these two issues are related, so I will deal with them together. I'm not sure it is a valid criticism of CR to say Bhaskar does not deal with Marxism and the concepts associated with Marxism in RTS. After all, RTS is a book on the philosophy of science. So why should he engage with Marx? I think here we have to be very careful about just what CR is and how it relates to Marxism. CR has no substantive theory of society as such. Critical realism (CR) does not say what the most important structures within any given society shall be, nor does it say anything about how specific structures will interact. All CR can show is that there will be such structures, and that the incorporation of them into our ontologies is perfectly legitimate scientific practice.

It is conceivable that a theorist or researcher could read CR then produce a theory that is consistent with CR that includes no mention of class, forces of production, dialectics, historical materialism, or other Marxist concepts. As John notes in his chapter, CR is not an inherently Marxist set of ideas. Many have noted the close relationship between CR and Marx, but this is because CR provides a better account of the kind of

science that is implied in the writings of Marx. And indeed, we have to historicise this insight. For prior to the emergence of CR and associated theories of science, it would have been quite common to regard Marx as a positivist. Of course, no one could legitimately claim this now. Prior to the emergence of scientific realism, however, Marx would have been viewed as a positivist. Critical realism simply provides a better account of the kind of science that underpins Marx's writings. In effect, Marxism and CR are differing levels of discourse. The importance of always keeping this in focus becomes clear when John claims that CR can offer insights on how societies undergo transformation through distinct transitions. I do not think CR can offer any insights on this issue. A social theory underpinned by CR, such as Marxism, for example, can. However, CR without additional substantive sociological additions has nothing to say about such issues.

I think Kathryn also expects too much from CR when she says that Marx provides a 'mechanism' of contradiction allied to an historicised philosophical anthropology, and then asks Jonathan to suggest an equivalent powerful mechanism in CR. This is asking CR to go into the terrain of specific historically constituted societies. Unless, of course Kathryn wants to argue that the mechanism of contradiction identified by Marx applies to all and every society; which, of course, would be a very ahistorical claim to make; and not one, I suspect, Marx would support. Individual writers influenced by CR might indeed suggest such a mechanism and it might be a mechanism at odds with that developed by Marx. These two theories might well clash substantially at the level of social explanation, but both remain perfectly consistent with CR. Critical Realism, as such, has no theory of specific societies.

Kathryn, of course, wants to stop this argument in its tracks by arguing that it is not possible to divorce critical realism from critical realists. But I fail to see why not? We can divorce Marxism from some of the more deterministic versions of it that have surfaced; just as we can divorce some of the readings of Derrida from what Derrida actually says; and just as we can divorce Althusser from many of the overly structural accounts of his work that often go under the name of Althusserianism. Of course, as a body of thought CR is constantly developing through the work of those interested in it, so in one sense Kathryn is correct. But if individual CR writers were to develop in ways that directly, and fundamentally contradict some of the core principles of what we understand to be CR, then we would be justified in saying 'this is not CR'. Divorcing critical realism from critical realists carries, for me, particular ethical and political implications, and these are most spectacularly illuminated in

the need to divorce Marxism from the political practice of it that most people associate with the name of Marx.

In terms of the historicity issue, I agree with Jonathan, but I would put the point somewhat stronger than John (Roberts) conceded. It is not a matter of CR incorporating history within its insights, but rather, that CR already insists that everything is in history. I do not see how there can be a fourth domain of history, when everything is always-already-in-history. John argues that his account of historicity revolves around an understanding of how mechanisms are always embedded within specific contradictory social forms of life that, in turn, are embedded within wider contradictory social relations. I think this is perfectly compatible with CR, and it is possible to find a lot of textual support in PON that suggests exactly this. I'm happy to concede that perhaps individual critical realists have not foregrounded this issue sufficiently in their own work, but this is a comment of the work of an individual writer, not critical realism as a mode of thought. Kathryn too concedes that CR incorporates history through the historical mediation of social structures and agency. This is certainly one way CR insists on a sense of historicity, but this relationship was only really developed in PON. *A Realist Theory of Science* (RTS), however, also incorporates history into the very fabric of CR.

Equally, I'm intrigued by Kathryn's criticism of Archer's treatment of structure (and hence history) as the accumulated result of the combined activities of previous generations. I'm intrigued, because whether this is Weberian or not, isn't this in some sense what structure is? And if not, just what is it? The structure we confront today is largely the result of what history has bequeathed us. Moreover, if, as is suggested, Weberian social theory sees social structures as distinctive entities that interact with one another externally, then this is certainly not wholly compatible with CR. Critical realism stresses that some relations will be internal and some external.

It seems to me that the issue that troubles both John and Kathryn, is not that CR fails to incorporate history, but that it does not advocate a certain account of history, and in particular, a certain account of the specific mechanisms in societies that drive history on.

JMR

I have just a few points in reply to Jonathan and Colin. First, I agree with both of your endeavours to use elements of other social theories in order to critically scrutinise the claims of Marxism. In my chapter, for example,

I use some of the ideas of Deleuze and Guattari to try and develop Marxism. Elsewhere I have also done the same in regard to the ideas of Foucault and some of the non-Marxist ideas of Mikhail Bakhtin. And, lest we forget, Marx built upon the ideas of Hegel and other notables in order to enrich his own social theory. I genuinely think that critical realism has managed to add something of value to Marxism, and here I would also agree with Jonathan and Colin that critical realism has clearly demonstrated that Marx did have a sophisticated view of how the world was structured. Therefore my problem with this is not that Marxism should not take on board other theoretical ideas. My problem, rather, is this. If Marxism is defined by a number of essential 'underlabourer' concepts, such as dialectics, contradiction, historical materialism, and so on, then wouldn't it be better to develop an 'underlabourer' theory that tackles these concepts at a high philosophical level? And, indeed, within Marxist philosophy we do find that this has happened.

Now, certainly it is the case that critical realism can be used by Marxist philosophers to develop an underlabouring philosophy, and this has in fact been the case. But even if Marxist philosophers have not been willing to use critical realism they have nevertheless conducted a large debate over the years about the theoretical categories used within Marxism. Many of these debates have been concerned to dissect concepts like contradiction and dialectics. Should we simply dismiss these debates as wrong-headed and ask critical realism to get the Marxist house in order? If the answer is yes then we really are admitting that critical realism has something more meaningful to say than Marxist philosophy about concepts like contradiction, dialectics, and others. We could then agree with Colin that critical realism works on another level than that of Marxism. But what criteria do we have to say that critical realism can audit Marxism? Because it is 'similar' to Marxism? How do we judge what we mean by 'similar' here? For example there are many ideas that are 'similar' to the theory of causal powers applied by critical realism, some of which are found within analytical philosophy. Why not use these ideas instead of critical realism as some have in fact done? If the answer is no, then we come back to the position that critical realism is one of a number of theories that are useful to Marxism, and I guess we all agree with this.

Thus to Colin's point that there is no reason why Bhaskar must deal with Marx in RTS, I would reply this may very well be the case. However, the fact that Bhaskar does not deal with particular concepts like contradiction in RTS must *limit* his underlabourer role for Marxism. RTS does not deal *only* with the philosophy of science. How could Bhaskar claim

to develop an underlabourer philosophy if he only looked at a substantive theoretical practice like science? As I understand it, an underlabourer philosophy seeks to go beyond theoretical practices in order to look more deeply at the claims underlying such practice. Therefore Bhaskar's claims in RTS are meant to establish a framework that can be used to critically explore other types of theoretical practice. And, indeed, this is what we find in later critical realist works by other authors. That is to say, RTS is used as a blueprint to examine a whole range of issues at different levels of abstraction. And it is precisely this movement that has lead some critical realists to construct non-Marxist theories of society in terms of human intentionality, beliefs, the different component parts of social structures, and so on. Do not such efforts go beyond the boundaries of being an underlabourer philosophy? Surely there is a huge jump from these speculations to their actual concrete manifestation. This is why the historical domain is so important. Such concepts must be mediated through historical systems so that they become historically specific to the object of study. In my chapter, for example, I tried to highlight how some underlabourer concepts, when simply applied to specific contexts, can become quite reformist in their application.

To deal now with a related issue I want to recall a point Jonathan flags up in his last reply. He says 'The actual is the domain where these different processes (structures and mechanisms) come together. It is structurally produced, but historical in the sense of being conjunctual and contingent, open to many outcomes. This may not be the way that Bhaskar talks about this distinction, but I think it is inevitable that we start to think in these terms once we start to apply his model to historical questions'. There are two problems I think with this reply, and what I say can also be directed at Colin's last reply. First, it resigns history to what can be termed as 'the flow' of historical events for example, that the state at such and such a date followed a particular set of policies that have effects upon state structures today. But this linear approach says that social structures change historically over time, and again nobody would object to this. What it does not say is how we unpack the specific ideological form and content of historical systems, along with their logical contradictions, irrespective of their actual and concrete linear manifestation. Systematic dialectics is one approach within Marxism that has attempted to look at historical systems in this manner. Second, and related to this point, Jonathan would seem to conflate history with contingency in the sense that history only figures to the extent that it prompts change in structures. From a Marxist perspective this precludes the possibility of developing historically specific concepts to examine

historical systems and their related structures, or social forms. For, on Jonathan's understanding, structures would only seem to be historical once they make contact with the linear flow of history through particular concrete events. This would mean, for instance, that we investigate commodity relationships in their concrete manifestation at a particular point in time and space and then follow how these relationships change over time. But, as I suggest in my chapter, this is not how Marx begins his analysis of commodity relationships. Rather he wishes to comprehend the abstract determining 'structure' of the historical system of capitalism which he discovers in the commodity. His concepts of value, surplus value and labour power, and so on, are historically specific for understanding the contradictory reproduction of capitalism. Thus to Colin's point that 'everything is always-already-in-history', I would reply that we need to be clearer about what history adds or diminishes to social theory.

KD

I want to make some brief points. First, I agree with Colin and John that early critical realism proved beneficial to Marxists in that it enabled them to bring out clearly and systematically the realist character of Marx's science. However, Marxists cannot rely on critical realists to do their underlabouring for them, for reasons which relate in part to the inadequacies of critical realism's treatment of history. John's last sentence is very much to the point here. It is not sufficient for critical realism to insist that everything is always in history. Rather historicity must be theorised. This is not to say that critical realism must 'descend' to the level of the historical. Rather, it must explain the whys and hows of historicity. This it signally fails to do, unlike Marxism. Now, Colin is not wrong to chide me for my apparent universalisation of the 'mechanism' of contradiction whereby Marxists explain (sometimes in a distressingly reductive or functionalist way, as in Cohen's *Karl Marx's Theory of History*) the historicity of the world. Contradiction is certainly particularly and peculiarly salient in capitalist modes of life. I do not have the expertise to say how or whether it applies in changes in the non-pre-capitalist world but I am open to the idea that contradiction is a universal which is present in different forms in different modes of human life. Beyond this, I would attribute a more fundamental historicising causal power to the active, imaginative nature of humans. So I would want to say that contradiction is a property of the world because of the nature of human nature. (Of course humans are always within (constituted by) specific social relations but are only open to such constitution because

of their innate potentials for active, imaginative engagement with (human and non-human) nature.)

Finally, on the question of structure, I agree with Colin, following Archer, that one sense of structure is 'the accumulated result of the combined activities of previous generations'. However, this is only one sense. Another sense, unfortunately neglected by critical realists, is the structure(s) internalised by individual humans as the internalisation of dispositions, capabilities and so on. If we confine ourselves to the first sense, we can conceive of the relationship between individuals and structures as external. Some, but not all, of such relations are external. The most fundamental and powerful relations are internal.

CW

There is obviously a fundamental disagreement between Kathryn and me on the value of the TMSA. I argue that under the TMSA there can be no realm of freedom independent of social context. Kathryn, on the other hand, seems to suggest that the TMSA allows for the possibility of a social actor outside of any and all social influence. Could Kathryn expand on this idea to give me a clearer indication of why you think this might be the case?

KD

In your chapter you do not elaborate in any detail on the TMSA beyond remarking on the lack of any theorisation, in Bhaskar's account, of the interaction between 'structure/society' and 'agency/individual'. This lack is not due, I would argue, to the inadequate development of a well-designed conceptual structure, but rather, the symptom of a fundamental design fault. The point is not to somehow stitch two separate 'items' together, but to critique the original separation. You seem to do this, by implication, in your resort to Bourdieu's habitus. I'm not convinced, though, that this can be bolted onto the TMSA so as to correct the deficiencies of the latter. As I understand it, Bourdieu's work was dedicated to the transcendence of a number of misleading dichotomies, including subjectivity/objectivity and structure/agency. He wants to begin to theorise human capacities/capabilities/skills/knowledges on a non-dichotomised theoretical terrain.

My position is that the structure/agency, society/individual dichotomy cannot get at what we need if we are to theorise the constitution of human capacities and that we need to so theorise if we are to be serious about freedom. Structure/society are reifying abstractions from human practices which are constituted by social relations. Why

not begin with social relations, as does Marx? Following Marx, I would argue that the language of structure is one which reifies social relations and naturalises the historico-culturally specific. In fact, as does the concept of 'labour', the dichotomous conceptualisation of human social life in terms of structure/agency expresses the specificities of the capitalist mode of life. As a conception of social relations, 'structure' expresses the essential difference between a way in life in which the most consequential relations are reified (through the impersonal mediations of money and bureaucracy) and are, therefore, experienced as extra-human powers overwhelming individuals. 'Agency' (which, in everything I've read as critical realism, is equated with 'acting from reasons' and in a causally efficacious manner) expresses the idealised understanding of bourgeois life. In fact, Bhaskar everywhere takes for granted a specific kind of human being, namely the strongly individuated, successfully intentional, self-conscious individual agent, as does Margaret Archer. Her chapter in the *Essential Readings* volume ('Realism and morphogenesis') demonstrates all of the weaknesses inhering in the TMSA. Everything that Archer says implies (or sometimes directly asserts) an external relationship between 'society/structure' and 'individual/agent'. For example, she uses the metaphor of a garment for society as something passed down through the generations, being repaired/refashioned by succeeding generations. Claiming that structures 'supply reasons for acting to those who are differently positioned' she insists that 'structural conditioning' or the transmission of 'structural influences' must be understood in terms of 'reasons' rather than 'hydraulics'

Of course, some structures do undoubtedly supply reasons for acting – the Inland Revenue, our university, for example. These are institutions/organisations with which we necessarily have a reflexive relationship and I can see that there is an 'ontological gap' between 'individuals' and 'society' as thereby manifested. But some of the most consequential institutions like language, gender and class relations as experienced through the family, get at us before we are capable of reflexivity. Their logic is written directly on the body as it were (back to Bourdieu). I doubt that we can sustain the notion of an ontological gap between these early constitutive institutions (society/structure) and 'individuals'.

In fact, I do not understand what is meant by the 'ontological gap'. Perhaps you could elaborate on this.

CW

First, let us work through the points of agreement. I agree that Bourdieu attempts to theorise human capacities/capabilities/skills/knowledges on

a non-dichotomised theoretical terrain. I also agree on the importance of social relations. Indeed, it is worth reminding ourselves that Bhaskar claims in PON that the subject matter of any nascent science of society is the sum total of relations within which individuals and groups stand. Likewise Bourdieu also insists on a non-reducible ontology of 'objective social relations' in which the habitus is situated. So we agree social relations are a fundamental aspect of any social ontology. Where I suspect we disagree is whether they exhaust it. I actually think that the issue here is 'differentiation' within a social ontology and we need to unpack what this means.

To illustrate this, allow me to return to a phrase from Marx: 'men make history but not in circumstances of their own choosing'. Marx alludes here to two things in his social ontology; men and their circumstances. Now setting aside the obviously gendered language, Marx clearly has a differentiated ontology, and we might even call it a dualistic one. I know dualisms are very unfashionable today, but maybe they are not all bad. At any rate, we need to assess them on their own terms not just dismiss them because we do not like dualisms. Two different things (men and their circumstances) can be closely related; often even internally related; hence they could be said to constitute each other. Men and their circumstances, we might say, constitute society. What do we mean by this? Well at a minimum probably something like both men and their circumstances are necessary for society. But notice, even when talking in this way we are not saying that there is only one thing (society), nor are we saying that either men, or circumstances, are reducible to the other, nor are we saying that we can take men out of society, or even society out of men. Both entities are necessary in order to explain society, but one is not the same as the other; each has particular causal powers that we need to investigate. In fact, in order to develop a relational account you will need entities that stand in relations with each other. Even if you start with social relations there will be an underlying ontology of the entities that stand in such relations.

This is exactly what I see Marx as doing. When he starts from social relations he does so out of a deep (and I would say normative) concern with men. Marx believes that understanding the social relations which men inhabit is a necessary first step to facilitating the move to a better, more just, set of social relations. Hence, for Marx, there is clearly an ontological difference between men and the social relations that make them what they are; and he believes that they can escape those particular social relations. So do I, although I do not think it will be easy, nor, and this is important, do I believe that this will be an escape into a realm free

of all social determinations (social relations). I get to this position from the TMSA, which I believe is perfectly consistent with Marx. So the point I am trying to make is that differentiation within a social ontology, does not imply complete externality as Kathryn seems to suggest, but nor does the fact that things are internally related mean that they are not still recognisably distinct entities with differing causal powers.

This is really the crux of the issue. It seems to me that to be consistent, you would have to not use the word structure in any context, nor the word human; since to do so implies differentiation. In which case I fail to see what you mean by human potentials in your chapter. There can be no such human potentials, only the potentials of social relations. And even if you want to maintain that it is these social relations which give individuals certain social forms, you are still going to need an entity that has the power to be formed in this way. So I do not think you escape the agent–structure problem (which I basically see as a problem of social ontology), you simply displace it.

You also argue above that the language of structure is one that reifies social relations and naturalises the historico-culturally specific. Having noticed this affect, I'm surprised you still use the term structure. However, I take a different view of social life and I do not think that the language of structure operates in the way you claim; it may do in particular circumstances, but there is no natural, or logical, necessity here. I'm also not convinced the language of structure naturalises the specific any more than the term culture does.

Equally, I'm not clear as to why you see the term structure implying extra-human powers overwhelming individuals. Certainly on the TMSA structure is not an extra-human power. Structure is only ever reproduced/transformed through the activities of agents, so it cannot be extra-human. This raises the issue of agency. I disagree that the term agency expresses the idealised understanding of bourgeois life. Why does it do this? In what way? Yes, Bhaskar does argue (not take for granted) for a specific kind of human being, and I'm happy to accept your description of this as the 'individuated, successfully intentional, self-conscious individual agent'. But this is only one aspect of their social being, not the totality. A large part of the causal power of any competent social actor comes from the social relations they are embedded within. Nor does Bhaskar suggest that they are always successful in their understandings of their situations. I too argue for such a view of the social person, and I think such a view is integral to thinking through the issue of social responsibility. So yes, for example, I do think President Bush is responsible in some way for US foreign policy today, even if his

actions can only be understood in a context of particular social relations. But the mere fact of these social relations, and the causal power they exert, does not expunge President Bush of personal responsibility.

For me the ontological hiatus simply refers to the fact that people are not the same thing as social relations (structures) and social relations are not people. As social scientists, what we are interested in is how certain forms of social relations and practices get transformed over time. In order to explain this process we will need an account that includes both social relations and people interacting over time.

You accept that there may be an ontological gap (now understood as difference) between some social structures and agents. Yet you argue that this cannot be the case for structures such as language, gender and class relations. In a sense, I agree with you. These kinds of social entities constitute us as certain kinds of social actors. But in accepting this I still maintain that there is an ontological distinction between language and the agents that use it. And indeed, it is certainly conceivable for individual agents to shake off these particular kinds of social entities. So, for example, specific gender relations can be transformed and subverted by individuals (transvestites/transsexuals for example), and people can, and do, move between languages and class. The attempt by the Welsh to shake off the shackles of the English language is a good example. Hence, social actors, although constituted by these very particular social relations are not the same as them. This is what I mean by the ontological hiatus; it refers to difference and differentiation within a social ontology. This allows me to return to Bourdieu. For whilst we agree that Bourdieu attempts to construct a mode of social theorising that transcends certain tenacious dichotomies, he still insists that the *habitus* is situated in a social field that included both individuals and objective social relations (structures).

KD

Colin, I shall respond to your points in no particular order taking first your citation of Marx's dictum regarding men and their history. Now, I accept that your interpretation on the externality of 'men' and 'circumstances' does not stretch the passage unduly. However, this interpretation is, I would argue, incompatible with the philosophical anthropology which Marx and Engels begin to develop in *The German Ideology* and with the 'philosophy of social science' which is suggested by the 'Theses on Feuerbach'. I refer in particular to the sixth thesis in which we find the words 'the human essence is no abstraction inherent in each single individual. In its reality it is an ensemble of the social relations'. This is

my point of departure for theorising human action and, therefore, human capabilities, dispositions and others.

What I take these words to mean is that individual humans are only the individual humans they are because of the historico-cultural social relations into which they are born, come to maturity and are maintained in maturity. From this point of view, it makes no sense to say that 'society' and 'people' are two different kinds of things as Bhaskar does. (By the way, I take your point about 'culture' up to a point. However, the difference between 'society' and 'culture' is that the latter has a history and series of referents which point us towards human plurality – a good attribute in a eurocentric age. The former does not.) To return to the main point, unlike you, I would not want to use the term 'society' at all, although I may occasionally slip into it for convenience sake or out of laziness. I do not want to refer to 'society' as an entity because to do so is to risk reifying the 'ensemble of social relations' in which the human world consists. Instead of speaking of society, I want to speak of the necessary social (always historico-culturally specific) dimension of all human activity. Now, I agree that we can and should speak of the human 'entity'. Indeed we must do so if we are to have grounds for a critical theory of society. However, the point about the human entity is that it is human potentially until it is immersed in social relations. That is the specificity of the entity: a specificity which is grounded in a particular biology, as I have argued in my work. (I find that I am now coming on to your second major point.)

Humans are only humans *through* and *in* social relations. I concur with Aristotle's point (which would be accepted, although not in this specific formulation, I would have thought, by followers of Marx of whatever stripe) that those who live outside the polis are either beasts or gods. The example of speech is overused but fundamental. Speech is a potential inhering in each individual human organism or 'entity', but its actualisation in the speaking subject only comes about through long-term immersion in social relations with mature speakers of a particular language. This is obvious, yet the philosophical implications of its obviousness appear to escape many theorists.

I know that it has not escaped you in that you agree that language constitutes us as 'certain kinds of social actors'. Since you do agree that this is the case I do not understand why or how you can go on to say that there is an ontological distinction between 'language and the agents who use it'. Language is an abstraction from speech and speech only exists through speaking subjects. Speaking subjects are human subjects who only exist through the internalising of the speech of other,

more mature speaking subjects. From this it will be obvious that I adopt the dialectical approach to these questions which Bhaskar describes and rejects in a couple of paragraphs in *PON* (pp. 32–33).

Two more points before I conclude: first, on your claim that, given my position, I cannot consistently use the words 'structure' or 'human'. I must confess that I cannot follow your logic here. It is the dichotomised usage of structure/agency to which I object, not the term structure. Clearly structure is present everywhere and in myriad forms. It is only because there are different kinds of structures (physical, biological, cultural) that humans can exist at all. On 'human' I am a realist about humanity in the sense that I see humans as possessors of innate species-specific potentials or tendencies which may or may not be actualised, as noted earlier. It is because of the gap between potential and actual, and the centrality of historico-culturally specific social relations in filling the gap that I reject the TMSA which, in positing an ontological gap between 'society/structure' and 'people/agency' is ignoring the significance of this 'intra-human' gap.

Finally, I turn to your comments on my point regarding structure and reification. What I said was that the use of the word structure expresses *the experience* of necessary social relations as 'extra-human powers overwhelming individuals'. In making this point I am invoking Marx's (admittedly underdeveloped) theory of alienation and reification. My sense is that this sense of structure hangs over the anxieties of theorists who seek to maintain a strong distinction between 'structure' and 'agency'.

CW

I'll respond to the points you raise in turn. I think it is an interpretative issue as to whether what Marx claims in the 'Theses on Feuerbach' does indeed contradict the distinction he draws between men [sic] and their circumstances. I take it that what he is getting at here is that there is no abstract human individual that ever exists outside of a set of social relations. In reality the human is always situated and constituted by sets of social relations. A human that was developed in a context structured by social relations would probably not survive. This does not mean there is not a distinct entity called the human that disappears under the weight of social relations (to suggest as much is to adopt a strong version of structuralism). If this is what he means, then I agree. If, on the other hand, he means that there is no human but only social relations I disagree. However, I do not think he means this. So we all agree there is something called the human; you simply see this and society as the

same thing (social relations). Although you also seem to suggest (the example of the potentiality of speech) that humans have potentials that are not reducible to social relations. Hence I'm confused as to how you can maintain that humans are only humans *through* and *in* social relations. Isn't this a denial of the gap between the human potentials and human actuality? Shouldn't you be talking in terms of 'entity potentials' and 'human actuality'?. Ultimately you argue that there is no ontological distinction between agents and structures. Society and humans have the same causal powers. Is this what you really want to maintain? For me it makes sense to say that 'society' and 'people' are two different kinds of things. If I die society continues, so I am clearly not the same thing as society. However, I do concede that Bhaskar was wrong to set the distinction up in terms of 'individuals' and 'society'. I prefer agents and structures; since society consists of agents and structures (as well as many other things).

It is also good to see you accept that there are such things as structures. However, you also maintain that humans are really social relations. But this is also what you claim structures are. So why not just dispense with the term human (if you really mean social relations) and structure (if you really mean social relations) and just use the term social relations? If everything is just social relations, what function do the other terms express? This is what I mean by saying that to be consistent you should dispense with the term structure. Everything for you is not only explainable in terms of social relations but also reducible to them. Everything that happens in social life is explainable in terms of social relations and social relations alone, because to paraphrase Marx 'everything in its reality it is an ensemble of the social relations'. I admire this kind of theorising, but I do not agree with it. I do not think there is a 'master key' that explains all of social life. I wish there was. For me social life is differentiated, complex, fluid, vague and contradictory and cannot be captured by focusing on social relations alone; even if I insist on the centrality of them to any social explanation.

I also do not see why the term culture has a history and series of referents that point us towards human plurality, whereas the term society does not. Society, for me, has exactly these attributes. Both terms are located in the emergence of particular historical discourses. Nothing is outside of history and culture suffers just the same. I think, in part, what we are talking about here are personal preferences about linguistic usage. But I think there are other important aspects to this. I insist on taking seriously the accounts social actors engaged in particular practices give of their activity; although I do not think that these accounts

exhaust what is going on. Insofar as these actors think in terms of society then the theorist cannot just dismiss them; or even go as far as to claim that society does not exist. I also think that culture is but one aspect of any given society; so again, I would insist on complexity and differentiation.

On the issue of language: The fact that language constitutes us as 'certain kinds of social actors' does not mean that our existence is dependent on the language we use, hence I maintain the ontological distinction between 'language and the agents who use it'; or langue and parole. If I stop speaking the English language, it continues to exist in the practices of other users. So I'm clearly not a language. Likewise, the English language is not the same as individual instances of it in use. Indeed, there are large parts of the English language that are not spoken every day, but they still endure as potentialities available to future users. Again, I reject the flattening of ontological differences. So I accept that I am constituted by a complex array of social relations, but this does not mean I am the same thing as them. I could not be constituted by them (and constitution is a process achieved over time) unless I was an entity in and of itself such that these relations could have the effect they do. Emancipation for me is the breaking free from one set of social relations into another.

Two further points. First, I still do not see why you claim that the ontological gap between agents and structures ignores the intra-human gap. It is exactly this that the TMSA insists on. However, it is interesting that you now introduce just such an ontological gap yourself. You admit the distinction between human potentials and actuality and claim that social relations bridge this gap. So there is still a hiatus in your ontology. You simply cash it out a different level. Second, yes I think very much that you are reacting to an account that sees structure as extra-human. Since Bhaskar explicitly rejects this account, it falls on you to show how the account of structure embedded within the TMSA is extra-human. To talk of a dichotomised view of agents and structures, in the singular, fails to take into account the varied and differentiated way in which different theorists, whilst insisting on the differences between agents and structures, do so in differing ways. To insist on the differences between agents and structures does not mean that structure is extra-human.

KD

Colin, in this brief reply I shall take your last point first, because it relates to everything else. The gap between potential and actualised human powers is, and always has been, central to my work. I have yet to

see evidence that critical realists take this gap seriously. It is because there is this gap that social relations are necessary. Social relations humanise the little newborn having the potential for such humanisation. Chimpanzees cannot be humanised in this way, in spite of the hopes of some. This is the reality of human nature. It is because of this necessary and normally beneficial and constructive nature of social relations that I do not understand your reference to the disappearance of the individual 'under the weight of social relations'. This remark implies that social relations are a burden. Now of course, they often are, in the experiential sense. But ontologically, they are what make us what we, actually, are, so it is odd, from this point of view, to consider them as a burden. However, it makes perfect sense to thus view them if we confine ourselves to capitalist social relations. Much of liberal theory, and of capitalist practice, does indeed conceive of social relations as burdensome. Hence, in part, my claim that the positing of an 'ontological hiatus' between structure and agency is an attempt to think the conditions whereby individuals can be relieved of this, specifically burdensome, set of social relations.

My last point relates to your insistence on taking seriously the accounts given by social actors of their own activities. I am pleased to hear this and happy to agree with it. My own work stresses the importance of 'appearances' in a way which is sometimes denied (implicitly or explicitly) by realisms. In using this term I am referring to peoples' everyday experiences, an understanding of which, from those peoples' point of view, is essential to theorising emancipation.

JMR

I have already made some critical remarks about the TMSA in my chapter and so I will not go over that ground again here. Rather I want to add some observations to what Kathryn has said. But first of all, I agree with Colin that an ontological distinction can be made between 'structure' and 'agency'. In fact, I would think that ontological distinctions could be made between all different objects of enquiry, both natural and social. Thus perhaps the important issue to address is how we think about the qualitative nature of ontological distinctions in a manner that is both consistently realist *and* materialist. In other words, is it possible to say that 'structure' and 'agency' are ontologically distinct forms of the same set of real social relations so that even 'consciousness' can be seen as part of the material world?

Colin invokes the famous quote from Marx that 'men make history but not in circumstances of their own choosing'. Colin suggests that we might call this a dualistic ontology. Certainly, on first reading this

quote, it would seem to be the case that Marx is presenting a dualistic reading. However, there is overwhelming evidence to suggest that he is a monistic thinker, though of a dialectical and materialist variety. To see what I'm getting at here consider the following. In the *Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts* Marx argues that there is no *ontological* distinction between mind and matter. 'Thinking and being are thus certainly *distinct*, but at the same time they are in *unity* with each other' (Marx 1981: 93). What this seems to suggest is that, for Marx, mind is a *form* of matter, though a qualitatively *distinct* one at that. It is, if you like, a thinking form of matter because, as Marx also explains, through labouring upon the objective world we increase our knowledge about the world. Thus labour, and the knowledge we gain from it, develops our consciousness and our way to communicate with one another through language. This provides us with a basis to establish further co-operative relationships with others, which then further develops our labouring activity, and so on. Importantly therefore Marx views the relationship between mind and matter as a monism. But to be clear what is being said here, Marx is not arguing that the relationship between the material world and how we think about that world is a static unchanging one. Even at a high level of abstraction Marx suggests that material world is in a constant state of motion. As a qualitative form of the material world, consciousness and thinking also undergo constant transformation. To give one example of what I mean here, in *The German Ideology* Marx and Engels say that the first historical act of humanity is the satisfaction of basic, fundamental human needs such as eating, drinking, habitation, clothing, and so on. However, basic human needs lead to the creation of new needs. These new needs are also an integral 'moment' of the 'first' historical act. Through this natural *and* social relation there develops co-operation amongst individuals as is evident in the development of the family structure and specific modes of production. Even universal human needs are a historical product.

Now, starting from this monist standpoint of difference-in-unity we can move to see how it might be useful in capturing the specificity of historical systems. The usefulness for Marx is that it prompts us to see and to explore how 'society' is broken down not into 'structures' and 'agency' but into qualitatively distinct ideological forms of life that are refractions of a more determining set of contradictions. Again, this is a monist position and I think it captures better the historically specific sense of 'social structures'. And this is what I take Kathryn to mean when she says that structures should be analysed within specific social relations. We could all give very elaborate definitions of social structures but still miss this crucial point.

On language I would also adopt a monist standpoint, and here I draw upon the work of the Bakhtin Circle. They explicitly reject the Sassaurian description of language presented by Colin. Without repeating myself on this subject about which I have written at greater length elsewhere (e.g., Roberts 2003 and 2004) the Bakhtin Circle argue that language is a refraction of wider social relations. A single word, for example, cannot be divorced from wider social relations in which it is uttered, nor from specific events within distinctive social contexts from which it is uttered. The word, 'money', obviously has different meanings within capitalism than it does within feudalism, and it obviously has different meanings depending upon when it is uttered in the historical development of capitalism, which capitalist country it is uttered within, and which social context within a capitalist country it is uttered within. This being the case, the word 'money' has different, and often contradictory, 'accents' embedded within its very form due to these various social mediations. It is for this reason that Voloshinov, a member of the Bakhtin Circle, says in relation to semiotics and language

> Consciousness cannot be derived directly from nature, as has been and still is being attempted by naïve mechanistic materialism and contemporary objective psychology. … Consciousness takes shape and being in the material of signs created by an organised group in the process of its social intercourse. The individual consciousness is nurtured on signs; it derives its growth from them; it reflects their logic and law. (Voloshinov 1973: 13)

Consciousness, for Voloshinov, is mediated through a multitude of objective material signs that, in turn, mediate consciousness in concrete life. But Voloshinov goes on to add that signs are determined by forms of labouring activity (modes of production) which, in turn, react upon other social forms of life and vice versa. I think that this approach to language situates utterances much more successfully within specific social forms of life than one which looks at language simply as a 'structure' that can exist on its own merits or can exist through concrete human activity.

CW

I think that the respective differences in our positions are now clear, so I'm just going to add some clarifications. By working at a differing level of discourse I mean that CR has no theory of specific historical societies, whereas Marx does. Marx also of course, worked at the level of philosophy, but moved on to develop this into a theory of society. Critical realism,

on the other hand has no developed account of how specific societies operate. Hence, it is not possible to move directly from CR to an account of social processes. To do this you are going to need additional concepts, either newly developed, or drawn from other theories.

Yes, Kant was probably a liberal in the political sense, but I do not think that all his philosophical writing were concerned with politics, just as not all the writings of Marx were concerned with a critique of particular forms of society. Hence, it is possible to accept Marx's critique of idealism without necessarily embracing his politics. Both Kant and Marx do indeed look at philosophy and both adopt social and political standpoints, but it does not follow that their philosophy and social theory are necessarily linked; although for individual writers this might be the case. Marx for example, is clearly a realist in the philosophical sense, but not all realists are Marxists.

Also, I certainly would not suggest that those Marxist philosophers that attempt to unpack certain concepts deeply embedded within Marx had not done excellent work. And I also would not suggest that we should dismiss these debates as wrong-headed, or argue that only critical realism can help the 'poor old deluded Marxists' get their house in order. For me, it is simply that when Marx is understood through CR things make more sense. There is an affinity between them. However, I'm not interested in fighting battles over intellectual hegemony, or safeguarding CR from Marx or Marx from CR. If Marxists want to carry on without CR then I have no problem, but equally, Marxists have nothing to fear from CR either.

As for the issue of RTS, Bhaskar was not claiming to be an underlabourer for Marx in that book. This idea came much later when the affinities between CR and Marx became apparent. In RTS Bhaskar did not set out to underlabour for Marx, but to critique a particular account of science and develop a 'realistic' model. Once this was achieved various writers noticed that this account of science had a striking series of similarities with the account of science underpinning Marx (i.e., Marx was committed to science, but was not a positivist). Additionally, I do not see the fact that he did not set out to underlabour for Marx in any way limits the fact that CR concepts might help Marxist philosophy in some respects. If it works it works, and it is irrelevant whether he intended the concepts developed in RTS to be used in this way. John claims that Bhaskar deals with something other than the philosophy of science in RTS. I do not know what that something else is. RTS is a book on the philosophy of science. Yes Bhaskar does claim that he sees his philosophy as having an underlabourer role; a term he appropriates

from Locke. The typical way this underlabouring role of philosophy is understood is as a ground-clearing exercise. What Bhaskar does in RTS is clear some philosophical ground surrounding the issue of science; that is develop a realist account of science. Once this is developed and he turns his attention to the human sciences in PON, he takes this realist account of science and argues that it can be utilised, with suitable amendments, in the human sciences, and it is here that the underlabouring work it might do for Marxism becomes clear and explicit. But RTS is only a book on the philosophy of science (and a particularly narrow aspect of it). But yes I agree, the claims in RTS are meant to establish a framework that can be used to critically explore other types of theoretical practice. This does not mean that he should have covered every conceivable theoretical practice in his discussion of the philosophy of science; not least because it is impossible to know the potential implications of a body of theory in advance of developing it. He needed to develop the framework first, and then explore how it relates to other forms of social theory. Indeed much of what John says implicitly admits as much since he accepts that some critical realists have constructed non-Marxist theories of society in terms of human intentionality, beliefs, the different component parts of social structures, and so on. So once again, we are back at the distinction between CR and individual critical realists who use CR to develop particular approaches to the social. As John, himself puts it, there 'is a huge jump from these speculations to their actual concrete manifestation'.

Finally a few quick comments on history. First, Bhaskar does indeed talk of the flows of events processes and outcomes as being conjunctual and contingent; this is finely developed through his account of interacting mechanisms in open systems. Second, it is not only that events/processes attach to the flow of historical events, as if somehow there were events/processes and history, but rather that events/processes are in history (they take place in time). Third, I agree this CR view says nothing about the specific ideological form and content of historical systems, because CR has no theory of such things. Fourth, CR does not only suggest that there will be change, but that there will also be the possibility of stasis and continuity, so there is no reason why critical realists cannot develop historically specific concepts to examine historical systems and their related structures, or social forms. Fifth, it is not that case that structures only become historical once they make contact with the linear flow of history through particular concrete events, because structures are themselves in time (although I would reject construing this in solely linear terms), and time does not stop. There is not structure

outside of history and structure in history. There is only everything in history.

JJ

I notice that I've not been contributing anything – mainly because I've been enjoying listening and also because I largely agree with Colin on this, although I'm sympathetic to John and Kathryn's concerns when it comes to what critical realists do. In fact, maybe the point is that we should be less concerned with what critical realists do, and more concerned with what Marxists and other social theorists do. In my own case, it was my concern with what Marxists were doing that led me to critical realism, not the other way round. Part of the problem with critical realism is that it has a tendency to become a bit cult-like with people interested in CR for the sake of CR. Maybe we should stop asking questions about the nature of CR and go out there and do social theory. Maybe the most useful thing I can do at this late stage is to bring an end to these discussions, noting that we have some significant differences, although I think there is substantial common ground between Kathryn and John and Colin and myself and substantial common ground among all of us on the broader issues. I would like to address a last question to Colin, however. It concerns the relation between structure and agency and the fact that we both want to see this as mediated by practice, practices or positioned-practice. Colin's chapter is interesting in using Bourdieu's concepts of *habitus* and social field to bridge the gap between structure and agency. I think that this is useful and correct, but I think it is only part of the story. I think *habitus* and social field shed light on how practices mediate between structure and agency, but I think that there are other concepts that can also play this role. I think *habitus* captures well the idea of individual dispositions, although Bourdieu also talks of *habitus* in relation to collective practices (Bourdieu 1990: 54). However, I think Bourdieu's concepts are more useful in an existential sense by which I mean that they help explain how we experience structure, past practices and past experiences. The effect of these may not even be conscious. Bourdieu talks of spontaneity without consciousness or will (ibid.: 56). But I do think *habius* is tied very much to experience, whether this be individual or collective. The concept of social field does broaden this notion out to give a stronger sense of objective social positioning. But I think, as Colin notes, Bourdieu's notions are strongest when helping us understand the mediated relationship between subjective world and the objective socio-cultural world.

The point I want to make is that I think Bourdieu's concepts help us to understand some important aspects of the process of mediation between structure and agency, but that it has a quite specific focus and cannot be used as the only explanation. Alongside *habitus*, I think we need to look at other mediating processes. The one I have been most interested in is hegemony as this has a more political character to it. In fact, I think the concept of hegemony has a wider span, capturing the broader socio-political aspect of the structure–agency relationship as well as its more consensual and coercive elements. I have previously formulated hegemony as the political moment in the reproduction or transformation of structures (Joseph 2002). I do not think that *habitus* can capture quite the same thing, although I do agree that it is important in understanding *some* aspects of the structure–agency relation.

CW

This is not something that I have thought closely about, and it is certainly an intriguing suggestion. However, I would want to make one crucial amendment. I would rather see hegemony as a political, social and cultural process that structures and inhabits (infects?) the whole of the social field. Hence, I would not see it as simply a mediating process, but rather, as a set of processes that have an impact (hence causal power) at all levels of my ontology. So I would certainly see hegemony operating within the *habitus* through, for example, the routinisation of certain roles, habits and dispositions. But equally, I would also see it operating at both the structural and agential levels. You yourself have indeed argued just this to good effect; so I'm not sure why we would want to make it into just a mediating process. I think hegemony is far too important to simply mediate. Also, I see Bourdieu's notion of the *habitus* as being the opposite of specific, since he does not specify just what the roles, habits and dispositions are; each habitus will vary depending on the structuring field within which it is situated. From this we would have to specify the particular roles embedded within any particular set of practices, and in a field structured by very intense hegemonic forces at the level of structure we would expect to find very clearly, and tightly, defined roles and habits. However, if the hegemonic bonds and pressures at the structural level were not so tight we would expect to see more innovative and dynamic practices at the level of the *habitus*. Of course, in any such ontology the *habitus* would indeed feed back into the structural level, so yes, I suppose in one way hegemony does indeed mediate, but it does so through the *habitus* not as a rival to it.

JJ

I think we can agree that hegemony is both mediating and structuring. And I do want to emphasise hegemony's (often ignored) structural aspect which I have argued is based on the need to secure the unity of various structural ensembles. I can also accept the notion of hegemony as routinisation of social roles and habits – this is where hegemony is at its strongest, most unconscious and deepest and where it most overlaps with *habitus*. So I think there is reasonable agreement between us. I do not want to reduce hegemony to a mediating role, the reason I mentioned it was to argue that *habitus* is not the sole way of understanding mediation. Rather, we need to look at how things like *habitus* and hegemony combine.

I think that this kind of discussion and the other debates we have had are indicative of the kinds of issues that CR should address. For all its insights, the publication of *Dialectic*, as I have tried to indicate in my chapter, has had the effect of pushing CR further down the road of overly schematic and speculative philosophising at the expense of aiding social analysis. I think we can all agree that the earlier works of CR, whatever we think of particular arguments, were much more compatible with the type of social analysis and social questions we are interested in. Hence, I think it is worth ending by re-emphasising what brought us together to write this book – a concern with social analysis first and foremost (our backgrounds are in anthropology, sociology, politics and international relations) and the ontological, epistemological and methodological issues flowing from this. Debates over structure and agency, historicity, social form and social mediation are crucial issues for social science to deal with. We all think that CR brings a lot to these issues although we may disagree over particular ways to interpret this. But we also think that to usefully draw out CR, we need to engage in social analysis itself, a final recommendation we hope this book can offer the reader.

Notes

1 Realism, Marxism and Method

1. Key early texts includex Kuhn (1970 [1962]) and Winch (1958). Note also MacIntyre's response to Winch's much discussed argument (MacIntyre 1971). See Giddens (1976) for comprehensive account of the issues at stake in this controversy. Hacking (1990) is useful on the influence of post-Newtonian physics on the undermining of positivist understandings of science and the world. See Keller (1985) for an important work in feminist philosophy of science.
2. See, for example, Laclau and Mouffe (2001). Rosenau (1992) is useful on the impact of postmodernism on social science.
3. See Rabinow (1996) for a discussion of the epistemological turn.
4. Archer *et al*. (1998) is an excellent introduction to Bhaskar's critical realism.
5. Gouldner (1980) is useful on this topic. Balibar (1995) provides an excellent philosophical introduction to Marx's work. See also Farr (1984); Resnick and Wolff (1987). It is worth noting the important work of contemporary Marxist philosophers. See, for example, Arthur (2002); Ollman (2003); Postone (1993).
6. This supposes the practice of 'normal science'. Kuhn (1970) remains an indispensable guide to the displacement of 'normal science' through scientific revolutions.
7. We recognise that these terms are potentially misleading and that, moreover, positivism is often little more than a term of abuse. Regarding their use, about which we have reservations, we adopt it because the distinction – and the differences to which the distinction refers us – is already deployed so readily within the social sciences. For a recent example see Hollis and Smith (1990). This work identifies only two intellectual traditions, one called 'explanation', the other 'understanding'. Giddens (1976) provides a useful account of different manifestations of positivism and hermeneutics.
8. On this point, it is worth noting the Popperian critique of verificationism, on which see Popper (1972). We do not have the space to pursue this question further here. See Bhaskar (1989b: ch. 1) for a discussion of Popper's 'refutationism'.
9. See Megill (1991) for an account of different conceptions of objectivity.
10. Rabinow and Sullivan (1979) provides a usefully succinct account of different manifestations of the hermeneutic, or interpretive, paradigm. See also Smith, N. (1994).
11. Bhaskar's insistence on the historicity of laws of human life does not, unfortunately, translate into historically sensitive research practices. The reasons for this are explored by Roberts in Chapter 3.
12. The late nineteenth century debates on this topic in Germany remain relevant. In these debates the concept of science was more all-encompassing than is that found in the Anglo-Saxon tradition. See Bernstein (1983: pt. 1).

13. We must note here the important existence of interpretivists who are prepared to speak of interpretive social science. See the readings in Rabinow and Sullivan (1979). The rejection of universalist claims as inapplicable to the human domain led, in the 1960s, to anxieties about 'rationality' and 'relativism'. These issues are explored in the papers in Wilson (1970). For a critique of the Western attempt to impose, via spurious clais to universality, its own way of life on the rest of the world, or to exploit the rest of the world in the name of universal reason and freedom, see Venn (2000).
14. The nature and political effects of the 'scientisation of reason' attempted by the positivist social sciences as adjuncts of government are explored by Habermas (1970). See also Wolin (1970).
15. Bhaskar discusses this in terms of the relationship between mind and brain claiming both the dependence and irreducibility of the former in relation to the latter (Bhaskar 1989a: 97–99). The mind–brain dichotomy informs the attempt to construct an 'artificial intelligence' with a complete range of apparently human mental powers. This attempt rests on the belief that human physicality and biology are irrelevant to the exercise of mental powers. See the papers in Haugeland (1997).
16. Giddens (1976) provides a thorough discussion of this, and related, matters.
17. Archer (1995) provides an exhaustive analysis of different attempts – including that of Giddens – to solve the structure–agency problem.
18. In addition to Gouldner (1980) see Ball (1984) for a discussion of the technocratic tendencies in Marxist theory.
19. See López (2003) for an analysis of the use of metaphors by modern social theorists.
20. See Hacking (1990) for a different interpretation of the 'making' of 'society' in the late nineteenth century. Hacking's main focus is on the governmental effects of the relationship between the new physics, which attributed indeterminacy rather than determinacy to the natural world, and the developing science of statistics.
21. On 'doing' ethnographic and qualitative research see for example Atkinson *et al*. 2001; Bryman and Burgess (1994); Burgess (1984); Fetterman (1989); Hammersley and Atkinson (1995); Denzin and Lincoln (1994); Mason (2002).
22. See Dean (2003) for a dialectical critical realist analysis of our contemporary allegedly depthless capitalist world.
23. See Rabinow (1996) on the nature and power of the Human Genome Initiative and on the centrality today of the relationship – that of a 'tight feedback loop' – between 'symbolic, monetary and political capital' (137).
24. Contrast Cohen (1978) and Sayer, D. (1987); Althusser (1990a, 1990b) and Arthur (2002). Cohen puts forward an economistic, deterministic, dualistic account of Marx's method which is systematically rejected by Sayer. Althusser proposes a post-Hegelian materialist dialectic which is referred to only in passing in Arthur's enthusiastically Hegelian account of the 'new dialectic'.
25. See Keat and Urry (1982) for an account of Marx's realism.
26. See Sayer, D. (1987) for an account of the social relations within which human activity takes place. See Dickens (2001) for a useful account of human relations with non-human nature.

27. See Bhaskar (1989a: ch. 7) for an excellent account of the Theses.
28. Note Althusser's quite correct insistence on the continuing importance of philosophy to Marxism. Since the human world is historical, the work of philosophy is never done. See Althusser and Balibar (1970). The importance of Balibar's more recent work on Marx has been noted above.
29. For some useful comments on this see Callinicos (1995).
30. See Kanth (1986) for an account of the politicising – the translation of theory into consequential action – of classical political economy.
31. In fact we can identify three starting points in Marx's analyses of capitalism: first, empirical reality as manifested in the Blue Books and so on, second, Marx's own concepts, third, the categories of political economy. See Zelény (1980), ch. 4.
32. For a realist discussion of abstraction see Sayer, A. (1981).
33. See Marx (1976a: 102–103) for his own thoughts on the differences between his and Hegel's dialectics. Shamsavari (1991) offers useful accounts of the Hegelian element (which, unlike Althusser, he sees as wholly beneficial) in Marx's mature thought. See also Arthur (2002); Nicolaus (1973).
34. For more on this point see Balibar (1995); Sayer (1987).
35. See Ball (1984) for an analysis of the relationship between 'Marxian science and positivist politics'.

2 Realism, Science and Emancipation

1. Of course, there is another strand of critical social thought that adopts a more ambiguous stance to this issue and intellectual battles have been fought over who are the rightful owners of the term 'critical'. I have in mind here particularly postmodern/postructuralist modes of thought. For the purposes of this chapter, however, I treat these as a contemporary form of the anti-knowledge faction. The confusion arises as a result of the political deployment of the term 'critical'.
2. I am referring here to the 'supposed' naivety of Voltaire and the 'supposed' negativity of Nietzsche. In practice, Voltaire was never as naïve as many of his critics like to suggest, and Nietzsche was not always as consistently negative as either supporters or detractors would like to think.
3. This much is clear from the themes that have driven recent conferences concerned with critical realism.
4. Aristotle distinguishes between the theoretical sciences (concerned with the truths of the world), and the practical sciences (concerned with human action). This distinction does not imply that the two realms are independent of one another. Indeed as I hope to show practice is always embedded within theory.
5. This was not always the case. The discovery of Aristotelian logic by Thomas Aquinas in the thirteenth century meant that the logical procedures outlined by Aristotle were used to defend the dogmas of Christianity; and for the next couple of centuries, thinkers attempted to shore up faith with logic. Referred to by Voltaire as the 'doctors of theology', they were more formally known as 'scholastics'. Unfortunately for the Catholic Church, the tools of logic could not be confined to the uses it preferred.

6. This is actually a radical view when considered in the context of the historical period in which he wrote. These were times filled with religious division between the Catholic and Protestant religions. What was to be believed was outlined by church officials in creeds and catechisms.
7. See especially the 'Third Antinomy', pp. 221–224.
8. Even when philosophers debate the relative merits of one or other epistemology they take these epistemologies as the ontological basis of their claims about epistemology. However, it is fair to say that philosophers of knowledge debate the strengths and weaknesses of various epistemological positions. Social scientists ought to be aware of these debates insofar as they may impact upon their own knowledge claims. Social scientists, do not, however, need to wait until epistemologists have settled all their own disagreements; not least because no such agreement seems forthcoming.
9. Bernstein (1983) calls this 'Cartesian anxiety'.
10. This does not mean that this is always the case. Regression in knowledge acquisition does occur. The point is, however, that when progression does occur it is always a relative phenomenon, not absolute. We may well be in possession of true knowledge, but lack a self-evident way to know that our knowledge is true.
11. Joseph, in this volume, suggests that the slide into spiritualism is embedded within DCR.
12. Bhaskar is very close to Socrates in his respect. Socrates thought that the soul was immortal, and that it knows everything that exists, because it is reborn from a previous life, and because it knows everything that existed in a previous world. The acquisition of knowledge is thus a process of remembering whatever has been learned in the past. Bhaskar has explicitly argued for the fact of reincarnation.

3 Method, Marxism and Critical Realism

1. Many of the points I make in this chapter build upon an ongoing debate between Marxists about the extent to which critical realism can be incorporated into Marxism. I was fortunate enough with colleagues to turn some of these debates into an edited collection (Brown, Slater and Spenser 2002), although my hope in this chapter to further these debates rather than simply repeat them.
2. Where Pearce and Woodiwiss part company with critical realists, and it is here that they would also part company with Joseph, is the idea that knowledge about the social world is arrive at, to a large extent, by understanding human behaviour and action. Pearce and Woodiwiss dispute this claim, arguing that it smacks of anthropocentrism and neo-Kantianism and, by default, non-realism. In addition, they see no reason to accept the critical realist assertion that social structures should be conceptualised as part of the non-human world, while human action is conceptualised as part of the human world. Instead they want explore the social world as being composed of 'structural entities and their interactions rather than human beings' (Pearce and Woodiwiss 2001: 52).

5 Agency and Dialectics: What Critical Realism Can Learn From Althusser's Marxism

1. This chapter is based on a paper presented at the International Association for Critical Realism conference in Amsterdam 15–17 August 2003. The present version has benefited from the comments of participants at the conference.
2. I take the term 'theoretical ideology' from Althusser (1990: 9–15).
3. For a clear statement on this point see Bhaskar 1989a: 31–37.
4. See Collier (1998a) for a constructive criticism of Bhaskar's account of absence.
5. See also McCarthy (1992).
6. Unlike the concept of society, which secretes naturalising tendencies, the concept of culture directs our attention towards a rich anthropological literature dedicated to the exploration of cultural plurality. Or, in Bhaskarian terms, it directs our attention to the 'ontological polyvalence' of human life.
7. The work of Soviet Marxists is also noteworthy here, on which see Bakhurst (1991). Among critical realists, Peter Dickens has been almost alone in attending to this matter. See Dickens (1996, 2004).
8. As Andrew Sayer has pointed out (1995), Marxists have also neglected the question of the division of labour. For a rare exception see Rattansi (1982).
9. See Meikle (1985) for a discussion of this matter, and of the connections between Aristotelian and Marxian conceptions of ontology thus conceived.
10. For more on the Aristotelian virtues, see MacIntyre (1981: ch. 12).
11. The distinction between 'practical' and 'technical' is made following Ball (1995). Following on from this distinction, praxis is the communictive activity of citizens acting in concert; techné is the fabricating activity of the craftsperson. See Arendt (1958). Beiner (1983: ch. 4); Bernstein (1983: pt. 3).
12. It is, to borrow the dubious but much-cited distinction of Isaiah Berlin, a form of 'positive' rather than 'negative' freedom. See Berlin (1969).
13. Bhaskar's *Reclaiming Reality* (1989b) is a clear and succinct introduction to his pre-dialectical ideas.
14. I have argued in Dean (2003) that, on this matter, contemporary capitalism is failing to do its cultural duty.
15. For more on this see Chapter 2 by Wight.
16. The work of Vygotsky (1986) is of great interest on this point.
17. The use of quotation marks is intended to remind the reader that the categories of objectivity and subjectivity are, like all categories, historico-cultural and make the kind of sense expressed here only in a fetishised culture. The work of critical theorists such as Adorno and Horkheimer (1979) remains crucial on this question.
18. The radical reduction of heavy industry such as coal-mining and steel-making in 1980s Britain is an example of this. Of course, this radical reduction would also have involved the transformation of 'subjective lawfulness B' in those parts of the world to which heavy industry was exported.
19. The literature on capitalism's different 'modes' or 'stages' is vast. See Albritton (1991); Arrighi (2005); Harvey (2003); Lash and Urry (1987).
20. In his later work, Althusser expresses his reservations about the use of the concept of totality, offering in its place that of the 'whole' (Althusser

1990d: 219). These reservations relate to the Hegelian resonances of the concept – the essentialism of the 'expressive totality'. The concept of totality is retained here on the understanding that it concerns an 'overdetermined' rather than 'expressive' totality that is, it does not have essentialist or functionalist implications. Where the concept of an overdetermined totality is deployed, the claim being made is that the future is inherently unpredictable.

21. It is worth noting that the contemporary mode of capitalism requires a revitalisation of sociability in various ways – teamworking, for example, – but not in a manner that is conducive to the citizenly virtues embodied in eudaimonia. Richard Sennett (1998) has interesting things to say about this. See also Dean (2003: pt. 3).
22. See Wood (1981) for an account of the separation of the political and economic effected by capitalism.
23. As (almost) always, Althusser's criticisms of the base-superstructure metaphor are timid and overly respectful in that he cleaves (or appears to cleave) to the economistic logic of that metaphor. In relation to this question we need to follow his own theoretical practice rather than what he sometimes says about his theoretical practice. In fact, while proclaiming 'last instance' economic determination, he also notes in an unusually bold statement against orthodoxy, that the 'lonely hour' of the 'last instance' never comes (Althusser 1990b: 113). My interpretation of his underdeveloped thoughts on this question is that he considers economism to be a capitalist political project which can never be wholly successful.
24. Althusser's work on causality has been developed by the Amherst School. See the papers in Callari and Ruccio (1996). This development is of interest, but tends towards an overly 'conventionalist' understanding of Althusser's work the realism of which is well explored by Resch (1992). Sprinker (1987) includes an excellent non-reductive discussion of Althusser.
25. This is far from the collapse into pluralism with which Alex Callinicos (1993) charges Althusser.
26. In this connection, Althusser notes the potential for the Ideological State Apparatuses to become the '*site* of class struggle' (Althusser 1984a: 26 – emphasis in original).
27. It is worth pointing out that my Althusserian analysis involves the use solely of Althusser's own work and not of those conventionally referred to as Althusserians. Some of the most robust criticisms of Althusserianism are pertinent to the work of Althusserians, such as Hindess and Hurst (1975) but are beside the point(s) of Althusser's own work. For an example, see Wood (1986).
28. We should note, as we did in relation to the clear distinction between 'objective' and 'subjective' that these distinctions – economic, political, ideological – are potentially misleading and apply in a strong form only to the relatively fixed differentiations of the 'organised' mode of capitalism (Lash and Urry 1987). For more on this see Dean (2003: pt. 3).
29. It is perhaps unfortunate that Althusser advances his theory on the basis of the concept of ideology. Redolent as it is with suggestions of 'false consciousness', of that which must be eliminated if emancipation is to be attained, the concept has been an obstacle to understanding quite how important Althusser's work on 'agency' has been, on what it now enables us

to do for ourselves. Since Althusser himself equates ideology and culture (1984b: 154, n.2) we can use the latter concept without doing violence to his theory (or, more accurately, notes towards a theory).

30. For example, he notes that Bolshevik agency was enabled through the 'condensation' of a multiplicity of contradictions in Tsarist Russia (Althusser 1990a: 96).
31. What are in question here are markets (concrete rather than abstract) for the exchange of everyday items, rather than of luxuries.
32. This crucial difference is discussed by Marx (1976a: chs 13–16, Appendix), also by E. P. Thompson in the final chapter of his rather oddly named *The Making of the English Working Class*. Calhoun (1982) focuses on the debilitating loss of sociability or communality effected through the transformation of artisans into proletarians.
33. The work of Norbert Elias (1994) is of great interest on this point. See Appleby (1978) on the cognitive demands of a changing division of labour in seventeenth-century England.
34. The literature on the emergence of new kinds of intellectuals is relevant here. See Gramsci (1971: PT. 1); Gouldner (1979); Perkin (1996).
35. See Bauman (1982) for an excellent account of the ways in which English artisans were domesticated to the needs of nineteenth-century capitalism.
36. See Rabinbach (1990) for an excellent account of the emergence of the natural and social sciences of 'labour power'.
37. Willis (1979) provides a phenomenological account of this. See also Sennett (1998, 2003); Sennett and Cobb (1993).
38. It is worth noting here that money and print are themselves contradictory in tendency and can nurture either (individual) activity or passivity. On money, Marx (1977) remains the necessary point of theoretical departure. See also Simmel (1990). As Simmel discusses, money facilitates release from humiliating bonds of personal dependence and can (but need not) contribute to the development of individual self-responsibility and independence (Simmel 1990: 297–303). Access to print via the acquisition of advanced forms of literacy can (but need not) have similar effects. For a general account of the emergence and effects of print, see Graff (1987). For an account of print's debilitating potential see Ong (1982). Habermas (1992) stresses the emancipatory effects of print. In order to judge the tendential balance effected by money/print it is necessary to analyse the institutional totality within which individuals are nurtured.
39. The dichotomous system/lifeworld conception rests on a realisation of the absence of significant individual agency in the 'system' and on, therefore, the necessity to retain a lifeworld sphere in which such agency can be enjoyed. This is a forlorn attempt to humanise capitalist modes of life. See Habermas (1989).
40. This is a major theme in Fredric Jameson's work. See Jameson 1992.
41. This is not to ignore the fact that debilitating 'labour' remains a necessity for capitalism. It is, though, to recognise that formal tertiary education, albeit of an often trivialised kind, is now required as never before in capitalism's history (Slaughter and Leslie 1997). It is too soon to be confident about the political implications of this.

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