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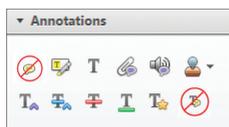
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In memoriam Roy Bhaskar (1944–2014)

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Roy Bhaskar, the founder of critical realism, passed away on the 19th of November. Born of an English mother and an Indian father, Ram Roy Bhaskar grew up in London and went to Oxford University. He wrote his PhD in philosophy under the supervision of Rom Harré. His six-volume manuscript, *Problems about Explanation in the Social Sciences*, was rejected by the examiners, not only because it was too long, but also, allegedly, because it contained nothing new. That PhD nevertheless became the basis for three subsequent books that would revolutionize the philosophy of the natural sciences (*A Realist Theory of Science*, 1975), the philosophy of the social sciences (*The Possibility of Naturalism*, 1979) and analytical critical theory (*Scientific Realism and Human Emancipation*, 1986).

A Realist Theory of Science, his first and most important book, is a classic and deserves to be ranked together with Popper's *Logik der Forschung*, Kuhn's *Structure of Scientific Revolutions* and Bachelard's *Le nouvel esprit scientifique*. Written in rather dense and difficult prose, it brought ontology back to the fore. What matters in science are the things themselves, their causal properties, and not the theories and the concepts we humans use to gain access to a reality we have not made. Those who mistake our knowledge and models of reality for reality itself commit the epistemic fallacy. Like Kuhn, they think that with every change of paradigm the world changes as well. The world is what it is. It is not, as Wittgenstein thought, the totality of facts, but a totality of complex things, interactive processes and structural relations with causal properties.

The great contribution of Bhaskar to humanity is that he demolished the positivist philosophy of science plank by plank. By means of a philosophical investigation of scientific experiments, he showed that the hypothetical-deductive model of Mill, Popper and Hempel is ill conceived. Scientists do not seek constant conjunctions between events ('covering laws'), but they look for the existence of generative mechanisms that explain the observed causal nexus between events as a necessary one. Downgrading the empiricist criterion, Bhaskar granted that those generative mechanisms may be unobservable, but that does not make them unscientific. He carefully distinguished between the real, the actual and the empirical and argued that generative mechanisms (like electromagnetic fields) may be real, but not actual or active (because other mechanisms contravene its operations) or that they may be actual, but not empirical (because there is no one to observe them).

If positivism does not hold in the natural sciences, one wonders how it is possible that for so long people have sought to apply it in the social sciences and humanities. If atoms do not behave in predictable ways, how could one possibly think that humans would act like atoms? In *The Possibility of Naturalism*, his second book, Bhaskar extended his transcendental refutation of positivism with an investigation of the conditions of possibility not only of scientific practices, but of social practices in general. He fished in the same waters as Giddens's *New Rules of Sociological Method*, Habermas's *Logik der Sozialwissenschaften* and Gillian Rose's *Hegel contra Sociology*, and proposed a praxeological exploration of the limits of both naturalism and hermeneutics. The result of his philosophical critique of the social sciences was a social ontology that systematically integrated Marx's relational conception of structure with a Wittgensteinian theory of practices. Unlike structuration theory, Bhaskar's transformational model of social action (TMSA) fully acknowledged the phenomenon of emergence and the relative autonomy of social structures. Social theorists, like William Outhwaite, John Urry, Derek Layder, Ted Benton, Bob Jessop, Andrew Sayer and, last but not least, Margaret Archer who went on to develop the morphogenetic perspective as a methodical extension of critical realism, recognized the importance of Bhaskar's argument and hailed the book as a watershed in the philosophy of social sciences.

If *The Possibility of Naturalism* worked out a philosophical critique of the social sciences, *Scientific Realism and Human Emancipation* launched a sociological critique of the philosophies of positivism, Winch and Rorty. Inspired by Marx's critique of political economy, Bhaskar developed a symptomatic reading of positivist, analytical-idealist and pragmatist theories of science as so many ideologies that are hampered by both a philosophical and sociological deficit: They are not only incapable of thinking the world independently from science (anthropomorphism), but also of thinking science as a social product and practice (fetishism). Up-ending Humean and Weberian orthodoxies concerning the fact/value distinction, he developed explanatory critique as a critical hermeneutics of liberation from domination. If a theory is philosophically inadequate, one must push through the disquisition to a critique of the social conditions that make them seem adequate.

Together, the three books – as well as his scathing critique of Rorty in *Philosophy and the Idea of Freedom* (1991), which, unfortunately, did not receive the attention it deserved and which should really be republished under another title – laid the foundations for a radical renewal of social theory. Bhaskar's work was so exhilarating and promising that it triggered critical realism as a philosophical movement at the cutting edge of the social sciences and the humanities. With high quality research in sociology and neighbouring disciplines, it had its heyday in the UK in the early 1990s. Who knows, thanks to the good services of Phil Gorski, Margarita Mooney, Doug Porpora, Chris Smith and George Steinmetz, the time for a realist revival of social theory may now at last have come in the USA.

Bhaskar never hid his radicalism and openly professed his allegiance to Marxism. The dialectical turn within critical realism did not come as a real surprise. But when Verso published *Dialectics: The Pulse of Freedom* in 1993, many sympathizers (including myself) were disappointed by the impenetrability of its prose. Developing his own philosophical system, his own language and his own N-dimensional diagrams, the

lucidity of the first wave of critical realism had been lost in a forest of neologisms. Notwithstanding the difficulties inherent to dialectical systems of inter-animated, intra-related, auto-reflexively, alloplastic, totalizing concepts, *Dialectics* has found its readership. Thanks to the selfless dedication of Mervyn Hartwig, the Friedrich Engels of critical realism who wrote introductions to all but one of Bhaskar's 11 books, edited the *Dictionary of Critical Realism*, and founded the *Journal of Critical Realism*, DCR (dialectical critical realism) is now promoted and discussed as one of the truly great works of contemporary philosophy.

As always, dialectics is tempted by the Absolute. The dialectical turn with critical realism was soon followed by a spiritual turn and a return to wholeness. Having embraced Reiki, Ram went all the way back to India. In the grand tradition of the Buddha (whom he once described as 'one of the greatest sociologists'), Shankara and Aurobindo, he started meditating on non-duality and expounded the wisdom of a higher, deeper, divine, alethic self. At the turn of the millennium, he came out of the spiritual closet and developed the philosophy of meta-Reality as a spiritual supplement to critical realism. While his language became more inspired and poetic, his philosophy became more intuitive, esoteric and generous.

Ram Roy Bhaskar was a man of many lives and many projects. Tall, obese, with long black hair, he was a rather striking figure who practised in earnest what he preached. He was a most generous person, always cheerful and positive, never embittered or sarcastic. Not that his life was easy. He lost all his money a decade ago and, later, also his right foot. In spite of his financial and medical difficulties, he never ever complained. Nor did he consider himself a genius or a guru. If people engaged in critical realism, he was happy, though untiringly he would try to sell the whole package of critical realism (not only first wave or classical critical realism, but also DCR and the philosophy of meta-Reality) to anyone who approached him. Bhaskar is now gone, but critical realism lives on as a powerful philosophical system that challenges empiricist certainties, positivist orthodoxies and colonial-industrial-capitalist exploitations of the self, the other, the world and the universe.

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