

THE DIALECTICISATION OF CRITICAL REALISM IN RELATION TO SCIENTIFIC AND POLITICAL PRACTICE

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ABSTRACT

This work attempts to discuss the ways in which critical realism could be thought in relation to scientific and political practices, especially those related to Marxism. Through critiques of Steve Fleetwood and John Michael Roberts, it defends the philosophical grounds and the possibility of such relations that critical realism has established for itself in what might be described as a meta-theoretical groundwork, while also providing practical examples of such relations. It then walks into a more direct, closer philosophical polemic revolving around the Kantian legacy of critical realism and aims to show what is lacking or misrepresented in the proposition that this legacy hinders the potentialities and actualities of any such relations with Marxism. Following this, it takes on the presumption that Hegel could sufficiently provide the philosophical “underlabouring” for the political practice and scientific practice related to Marxism, and while doing so, it relies on the difficulties of an “inversion” of Hegelian dialectics. Finally, it hints on the potentialities for emancipatory practices that emanate from a dialectical critical realist axiology of freedom.

ÖZET

Bu çalışma, eleştirel gerçekçiliğin bilimsel ve politik pratiklerle, özellikle de bunların Marksizmle ilintili olanlarıyla nasıl ilişki içinde düşünülebileceğini tartışmayı hedefliyor. Steve Fleetwood ile John Michael Roberts'a yönelik eleştiriler üzerinden, meta-teorik bir zemin çalışması olarak betimlenebilecek bir biçimde bu ilişkilerin eleştirel gerçekçilik tarafından inşa edilmiş felsefi temellerini ve mümkünlüğünü savunuyor ve bu ilişkilere pratikten bazı örnekler veriyor. Ardından eleştirel gerçekçiliğin Kantçı mirası etrafında dönen daha doğrudan bir felsefi polemige girerek bu mirasın söz konusu ilişkilerin olanaklarına ve edimselliğine gölge düşürdüğü savında nelerin eksik ya da yanlış sunulduğunu göstermeyi amaçlıyor. Bunu takiben, Hegelci diyalektiğin “ters çevrilmesi”ndeki güçlüklerle dayanarak, Hegel'in Marksizmle ilintili politik ve bilimsel pratikler için yeterli felsefi “hizmeti” sağlayabileceği önermesini ele alıyor. Son olarak, özgürlüğün diyalektik eleştirel gerçekçi bir değer kuramının, özgürleşimci pratikler için doğurabileceği olanaklar konusunda ipuçları veriyor.

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

THE DIALECTICISATION OF CRITICAL REALISM IN RELATION TO SCIENTIFIC AND POLITICAL PRACTICE	1
I. GENERAL INTRODUCTION	7
1. About this Work	7
2. A Brief Introduction to Critical Realism: Notes on Terminology and Some Excerpts	10
II. WHAT CAN PHILOSOPHIES RELATE TO?	14
1. On the Grounds of an Interaction	14
2. Philosophy and the Legitimacy of Talk of Its Potential Relations	18
3. Some Examples of Relations Between Philosophy, Scientific Practice and Political Practice	24
4. Marxism, Materialism, Idealism	30
III. A PHILOSOPHY FOR MARXISM & “MARXIST FOUNDATIONS”	32
1. The Status of Historical Materialism & <i>Marxist</i> philosophy of science or <i>Marxist Philosophy of Science?</i> (2)	32
2. Marxist Science?	40
IV. ON THE KANTIAN INHERITANCE OF CRITICAL REALISM	46
1. Philosophical Legacy: A mode of argumentation	47
2. The Scandal of Philosophy	50
3. From Locke and Hume	56
4. Meanwhile in Critical Realism	59
V. HEGELIAN DIALECTICS AND THE PROBLEM OF INVERSION	68
1. Thought Determines Matter	69
2. Object/Subject Dichotomy	71
3. Phenomena / Noumena Dichotomy	72
4. <i>Identity</i> of Being and Thought In Thought	74
5. What Dialecticised Critical Realist Ethics Can Bring	77
BIBLIOGRAPHY	82

I. GENERAL INTRODUCTION

“It seemed to me patently obvious that society is constituted by more than just language; that society is about real oppression, real acute poverty, real deaths, real wars, real battles, and that there is a huge distinction between the word ‘battle’ or any number of sentences about a battle and a real battle.”¹

Roy Bhaskar

1. About this Work

This work attempts to discuss the ways in which critical realism could be thought in relation to scientific and political practices, especially those related to Marxism. Through critiques of Steve Fleetwood and John Michael Roberts, it defends the philosophical grounds and the possibility of such relations that critical realism has established for itself in what might be described as a meta-theoretical groundwork, while also providing practical examples of such relations. It then walks into a more direct, closer philosophical polemic revolving around the Kantian legacy of critical realism and aims to show what is lacking or misrepresented in the proposition that this legacy hinders the potentialities and actualities of any such relations with Marxism. Following this, it takes on the presumption that Hegel could sufficiently provide the philosophical “underlabouring” for the political practice and scientific practice related to Marxism, and while doing so, it relies on the difficulties of an “inversion” of Hegelian dialectics. Finally, it hints on the potentialities for emancipatory practices that emanate from a dialectical critical realist axiology of freedom.

¹Roy Bhaskar with Mervyn Hartwig, *The Formation of Critical Realism*, (London: Routledge 2010), 39.

In the rest of the first chapter, I lay out some introductory notes and passages on the philosophical starting points and preliminary terminology pertaining to different stages in the development and formation of critical realism.

In the second chapter, I start by accentuating the significance of differentiating a certain philosophy and Marxism as a whole. Then I ponder on the possible implications of an ambiguity in Fleetwood's formulation of the possible relations between critical realism and Marxist theory and political practice, which seems to bestow a contingent prerogative on "Marxist philosophy" in general, and dialectical materialism more specifically, restricting any possible relations of critical realism with scientific and political practices to a mediation of a prior relation with the Marxist philosophy readily at hand. I argue that to claim a non-contingency in such a decoration will tend to elide the intrinsically polemical aspect of philosophy and render it a-historical. I then move on to discuss some examples of possible and actual relations between critical realism and political and scientific practice. I end this chapter in concordance with Fleetwood's remark that Marxism has been lacking a "full-blown" philosophy of science.

In the third chapter, I examine the case brought forward by Roberts on why "Marxism doesn't require the services of critical realism" which consists in the principle that any philosophy of science for Marxism has to start from the fundamentals of Marxism itself, and should *not* develop some comprehensive philosophical framework and *then* try to fit Marxism in it. So I investigate the "foundations" Roberts suggests, namely, historical materialism. I firstly examine if historical realism can be regarded as a science, and try to show that it is either (i) an uncompleted research programme that has a lot of ambiguities to begin with, and the

difficulties in construing *the Capital* as a pure exemplary application of it, or (ii) as Bhaskar tends to do, and as Lukacs overtly does, a method, or a set of philosophical premises. If it *is*, in fact, to be located in the realm of philosophy, then we are again facing the *contingency* of such a role yielded to it, as the necessary starting point of any philosophy of social science, and this time it takes the form of dogmatism. If we are to regard it as a science anyway, then the question whether if it is the *single possible* social science arises. If it is not, then we shouldn't have any problem of having firstly a philosophical framework and then locating it as a science among others. If it *is*, then we have to face the problems of the reduction of all conceivable social phenomena to objects of historical materialism. This is how the line of argumentation progresses in chapter three.

In chapter four, I get into a more technically (than meta-theoretically) philosophical debate with Roberts, who contends that the Kantian legacy of critical realism renders it problematic for its possible relations with Marxism. I try to pinpoint the tendencies in Roberts and Sayers to illicitly conflate the notions of transcendence and transcendental argumentation and how they result in misrepresentations of both Kantianism and critical realism. While doing so, I try to remind that critical realism in fact provides an immanent critique of empirical realism and transcendental idealism.

In chapter five, starting from the presumptions of Sean Creaven, Fleetwood and Roberts, who argue either for a direct adoption of Hegelian dialectic or an inversion of it, I attempt to demonstrate that such an inversion would leave us with nothing but more or less the same dialectic.

As a conclusion, I suggest that the ethics of dialectical critical realism can

provide promising potentialities for emancipatory practices in general, by centralizing truth and a Marxian definition of eudaimonia, in the spirits of Plato, Aristotle and Marx.

2. A Brief Introduction to Critical Realism: Notes on Terminology and Some Excerpts

Introductions to critical realism are numerous and vary in length from books to paper sized articles. The central philosophical themes of critical realism are “dissolved” throughout this whole work and constitute the cement of every single chapter, but in this section, my intention is to nevertheless offer the reader a contextual basis to get a “feel” of its very basics and some of its unique terminology from the start. The passages are carefully chosen to grasp the core ideas in a nutshell.

Roy Bhaskar published three books in the period 1975-1986. The first one of these was “*A Realist Theory of Science*,” where he develops the philosophy of science dubbed “transcendental realism.” In this work, he analyzes scientific experiment and certain philosophies of science, transcendently arguing that the very act of making an experiment assumed certain aspects of ontology:

It is the overall argument of this study then that knowledge must be viewed as a produced means of production and science as an ongoing social activity in a continuing process of transformation. But the aim of science is the production of the knowledge of the mechanisms of the production of phenomena in nature that combine to generate the actual flux of phenomena of the world. These mechanisms, which are the intransitive objects of scientific enquiry, endure and act quite independently of men. The statements that describe their operations, which may be termed ‘laws’, are not statements about experiences (empirical statements, properly so called) or statements about events. Rather they are

statements about the ways things act in the world (that is, about the forms of activity of the things of the world) and would act in a world without men, where there would be no experiences and few, if any, constant conjunctions of events. (It is to be able to say this *inter alia* that we need to distinguish the domains of the real, the actual and the empirical.)²

The second book, *“The Possibility of Naturalism,”* is the one where he developed the philosophy dubbed “critical naturalism.” In this work, Bhaskar investigates to what extent can social sciences work like natural sciences while breaking down some dominant dichotomies in philosophies of social science in a specific understanding of society called the “transformational model of social activity”:

The model of the society/person connection I am proposing could be summarized as follows: people do not create society. For it always pre-exists them and is a necessary condition for their activity. Rather, society must be regarded as an ensemble of structures, practices and conventions which individuals reproduce or transform, but which would not exist unless they did so. Society does not exist independently of human activity (the error of reification). But it is not the product of it (the error of voluntarism). Now the processes whereby the stocks of skills, competences and habits appropriate to given social contexts, and necessary for the reproduction and/or transformation of society, are acquired and maintained could be generically referred to as socialization. It is important to stress that the reproduction and/or transformation of society, though for the most part unconsciously achieved, is nevertheless still an achievement, a skilled accomplishment of active subjects, not a mechanical consequent of antecedent conditions.³

The third book is titled *“Scientific Realism and Human Emancipation,”* in which Bhaskar introduced a critique of positivism as an ideology while he developed the

²Roy Bhaskar, *A Realist Theory of Science* (London: Routledge, 2008), 6.

³Roy Bhaskar, *The Possibility of Naturalism: A Philosophical Critique of the Contemporary Human Sciences* (London: Routledge 1998), 39.

notion of “explanatory critique” in his previous work further and aimed at breaking down the fact/value dichotomy, arguing that “Appreciation of the emancipatory dynamic of explanatory theory dissolves the rigid dichotomies –between fact and value, theory and practice, explanation and emancipation, science and critique– structuring traditional normative discourse.”⁴

The philosophy developed in these three books altogether would be dubbed “basic critical realism” or more popularly, “scientific realism,” but “critical realism” can refer to every single one of these works separately or to all of them as a whole, and it may also include the later stages. Critical Realism is the most general name for this overall philosophy, and none of these stages are limited to the works of Bhaskar. All three of these books were quite influential, they brought important novelties to realist and materialist philosophy, and this critical realist position started growing as more philosophers contributed.

A relevant note for this work would be that Bhaskar essentially saw the late Marx as implicitly a (proto-)scientific realist:

Epistemically, Marx was, or at least became, a *realist* in a sense close to that of modern scientific realism - in that he understood (i) the job of theory as the empirically controlled retrodution of an adequate account of the structures producing the manifest phenomena of socio-economic life, often in opposition to their spontaneous mode of appearance; (ii) such structures to be ontologically irreducible to and normally out of phase with the phenomena they generate, so acknowledging the stratification and differentiation of reality; (iii) their adequate re-presentation in thought as dependent upon the critical transformation of pre-existing theories and conceptions, including those (in part) practically constitutive of the phenomena under study; (iv) recognition of the process of scientific knowledge as a practical, laborious activity (in the "transitive dimension") as going hand-in-

⁴Roy Bhaskar, *Scientific Realism and Human Emancipation* (London: Routledge, 2009), 169.

hand with recognition of the independent existence and transfactual activity of the objects of such knowledge (in the 'intransitive dimension') which remain "outside the head, just as before" (*Grundrisse*, Introduction). For Marx there is no contradiction between the *historicity* of knowledge and the *reality* of their objects - rather they must be thought as two aspects of the unity of known objects.⁵

Then, two turns took place in critical realism. The first came with the works "*Dialectic: The Pulse of Freedom*" and (shortly after it) "*Plato Etc.: The Problems of Philosophy and Their Resolution*" and this new stage was designated as "Dialectical Critical Realism." Ruth Groff summarizes the process:

"With the publication of DPF [*Dialectic: The Pulse of Freedom*] and PE [*Plato Etc.*], Bhaskar turned his attention from Hume, and to a certain extent Kant, to Hegel. In DPF and PE, Bhaskar sought to transform critical realism into a fully dialectical philosophical system. Dialectical critical realism, as it quickly came to be called, is a comprehensive theoretical framework in which the category of absence is seen to lead to the necessity for, and possibility of, what Bhaskar has termed 'eudaimonistic' society. The realism about natural and social structures that Bhaskar advanced in RTS [*A Realist Theory of Science*] and The Possibility of Naturalism (PON) is seen as being part of the 'prime (first) moment' of a 'circuit of ... links and relations' which forms a larger conceptual whole."⁶

The second turn, namely the spiritual turn, started with the publication of *From East to West: Odyssey of a Soul* which introduced "Transcendental Dialectical Critical Realism," but both this designation and some of the discourse adopted in the book were dropped and the latter was superseded by a secular one. The turn eventually

⁵Roy Bhaskar, "Science," in *A Dictionary of Marxist Thought*, ed. Tom Bottomore et al. (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing 2001), 491.

⁶"Critical Realism, Post-positivism and The Possibility of Knowledge," Ruth Groff, Routledge Publishing, London 2004, p.72.

culminated in the philosophy of Meta-Reality, on which three books were published: *From Science to Emancipation*, *Reflections on Meta-Reality* and *The Philosophy of meta-Reality*. This last stage in critical realism will not be included in this thesis, but for the sake of completion, I will quote Hartwig's reference to Einstein who outlines pretty much a direct summary of the philosophy of Meta-Reality:

"A human being is part of the whole, called by us the universe, a part limited in time and space. He experiences himself, his thoughts and feelings, as something separated from the rest, a kind of optical delusion of his consciousness. This delusion is a kind of prison for us, restricting us to our personal desires and to affection for a few persons nearest us. Our task must be to free ourselves from this prison by widening our circles of compassion to embrace all living creatures and the whole of nature in its beauty. The true value of a human being is determined by the measure and the sense in which they have obtained liberation from the self. We shall require a substantially new manner of thinking if humanity is to survive."⁷

II. WHAT CAN PHILOSOPHIES RELATE TO?

1. On the Grounds of an Interaction

Before stepping into an examination of critical realism's "compatibility" with Marxism or what it can bring to or take away from it, there's a need to talk about the assumptions made when enunciating the phrase "the relation between critical realism and Marxism." There's a very simple *prima facie* description of what critical realism is: It is a philosophy, only a philosophy, and only *one* of the philosophies at hand. And particularly, it is a "full blown" philosophy of science (I will come back to this concept used by Fleetwood). It should be clear that it is not only this modest position

⁷Albert Einstein's letter quoted in Mervyn Hartwig, "Introduction" to Roy Bhaskar, *Reflections on metaReality: Transcendence, Emancipation and Everyday Life* (Routledge 2011).

of critical realism that makes it necessary to make the aforementioned assumptions explicit. The main reason is on the other side of the palanquin: Marxism.

Marxism, when looked back upon its history, or even when it is approached in the empirically given current weakness of its practical and theoretical efficacy on a global scale, is a *sui generis*, complex and multi-faceted reality of *extraordinary specificity* which has made such a great mark on the world that critical realism can hardly dream of (though, we don't know what the future will bring, and I believe it would be legitimate for all philosophies to dream, albeit 'hardly,' of such influence). This shouldn't be read as the bragging of the big fish to the little one. It is just a reminder that one should be aware of the fact that when we are discussing the character of such a relation, we are actually dealing with two very different things.

The locomotive force of a distantiation between Marxism and the thought of enlightenment (say, in its deterministic and positivist, hyper-naturalist forms), for instance, could be the close bonding of Foucault with "Marxism" via Althusser as well as the defeat of the German revolution that was expected closely after the birth of the Soviet revolution (an expectation that hasn't been silent at all) and the subsequent Chinese revolution, which together combined presented a counter-fact to the "scientific" view that the conditions of a socialist revolution lied in the high development of the proletariat, or the level of advancement of the forces of production. What compels me to underline that every time we refer to such relations, we are effectively moving on a crucial and sharp terrain of specificity of Marxism, is the nature of such distinctions (between a theoretical incorporation of a philosopher and the defeat/victory of a revolution) of which the examples are endless.

Among some of the examples of investigation on critical realism and

Marxism, in such assumptions made by Marxists either having affiliations with critical realism or not, and even more interestingly, also by some critical realists, the clues of a research question like “Can critical realism, as a theory on science, bring suggestions on the methodological problems of Marxism as a science?” is strikingly apparent. Philosophical references in the *Capital*, the *Grundrisse* or even the *Manuscripts* are being scanned and both what Marx has said about his own methods and the methods that are argued to be employed in his economics (via arguments put forth by deduction, so that they are made explicit from their implicit forms in Marx’s works) are compared with critical realist propositions.

I believe the former of these efforts cannot be deemed conclusive (although it could be very valuable in some contexts) because,

1) of the lack of a concrete, consistent totality in the very broad and the intellectually varying corpus of Marx in which one could find several references to polar deliberations, and

2) it could very well be the case that Marx’s own account of his scientific methodology may not be the most accurate exposition of the actual one.

Scientific practice and philosophical reflections of those scientists on their own work do not always walk hand in hand, as Althusser discusses in *Philosophy and the Spontaneous Philosophy of Scientists*, and Collier in his discussion of the “nocturnal philosophy of scientists.”⁸ This is not to dismiss Marx as a philosopher, but abstractly differentiate his scientific work from his philosophical work.

⁸Andrew Collier, *Critical Realism: An Introduction to Roy Bhaskar's Philosophy* (London: Verso, 1994), 206.

However, the main point I want to make about these comparisons is this: *A possible relation between critical realism and Marxism, includes the relation between the practice of scientific study of the capitalist mode of production and critical realism's discussions of scientific methodology, but cannot be reduced to a relation between a science and a philosophy of science.* Such reductions would either interpret Marxism as a non-complex singularity and omit the fact that Marxism is more than a science, or have to argue against the idea that there are more ways philosophies could and should relate to Marxism (or within a broader sense, to emancipatory politics) than only through science serving as a road block and collecting goods from them, an argument which would draw very restrictive limits on potential mutualities and reciprocal nourishment.

It is worth noting that the effort of Marxist philosophy was never limited to smoothing the rocky methodical roads of economics, nor, within a critical realist terminology, a philosophical underlabouring for the scientific analysis of a certain mode of production. I reckon it was in these spirits when Bhaskar completed his much impressive account of theory of knowledge in Marxism (which was originally published as an entry in *A Dictionary of Marxist Thought*, but later reproduced with changes elsewhere) by punctuating a continuing tension:

Between the theory of knowledge and Marxism, there will always, however, remain a certain tension. For, on the one hand, there are sciences other than Marxism, so that any adequate epistemology will extend far beyond Marxism in its intrinsic bounds; but, on the other, science is by no means the only kind of social practice, so that Marxism has greater extensive scope. There will thus always be a tendency for one or the other to be subsumed - as, within the concept of Marxist epistemology, epistemology becomes critically engaged and Marxism submits itself to a reason

it displaces.⁹

Here, I can start exploring some of the research examples of the aforementioned relation that makes scientific realism the main object of inquiry, rather than the later dialectical developments.

2. Philosophy and the Legitimacy of Talk of Its Potential Relations

I will begin with a three-in-one article: *The Marriage of Critical Realism and Marxism: Happy, Unhappy or on the Rocks?* by Andrew Brown, Steve Fleetwood and John Michael Roberts. Fleetwood, who is pro-Happy with regard to the question in the title, starts his investigation with an interesting distinction:

*“There is ... no one-to-one mapping between a particular (Marxist) political practice, a particular (Marxist) theory and a particular (dialectical materialist) philosophy. The truth of this proposition lies in the (probably uncontroversial) fact that there are several competing Marxist theories (about various phenomena) and several Marxist political programmes, all perfectly compatible with dialectical materialist philosophy.”*¹⁰ (Italics original).

I cannot agree that the fact in question is really uncontroversial, in fact it might be just what most of the controversy in Marxist philosophy is about, and besides, even if there is such a perfect compatibility, it brings up the question if this indicates some negatively effective ambiguities of dialectical materialism, that it is lacking in concreteness and is too flexible to be of use to any particular theory or practice and

⁹ Roy Bhaskar, *“Reclaiming Reality,”* (London: Routledge 2011), 82.

¹⁰ Andrew Brown, Steve Fleetwood and John Michael Roberts, “The Marriage of Critical Realism and Marxism: Happy, Unhappy or on the Rocks?” in Andrew Brown, Steve Fleetwood and John Michael Roberts, (eds.), *Critical Realism and Marxism* (London and New York: Routledge 2012), 2.

so on. Such perfect compatibility with essentially differing positions could seem to make it otiose. However, I believe Fleetwood is trying to move on to a direction that is more theoretical than empirical in character: He says that if that is the case, then we cannot talk about a “direct,” immediate relation, or one that resides in the same plane between critical realism and Marxist political practice or Marxist theory.

“It is ... erroneous to seek a possible relationship between critical realism and Marxist theory or Marxist political practice, but not between critical realism and Marxism at the level of philosophy. That is to say, if a relationship exists between critical realism and Marxism, it is located at the philosophical level.”¹¹

Let’s ponder on this argument. I think there’s an ambiguity in this conceptualization, which puts Fleetwood into conflict with his intentions of arguing for the legitimacy of talking about a relationship between Marxism and a certain philosophy that is not card-carryingly Marxist. First, we should ask, what exactly remains in “Marxism” when “Marxist theory and Marxist political practice” are subtracted, or in different terms, what is it exactly that critical realism can relate with within “Marxism in the level of philosophy,” if they are specifically not Marxist theory and Marxist practice? From Fleetwood’s overall terminology employed in his article, only “Marxist philosophy” comes into mind as a probable answer (or perhaps even more specifically, dialectical materialism¹² but I will stick with the more general term -Marxist philosophy). Now we can ask, ‘How will *Marxist* philosophy then, after interacting with Critical Realism, in turn effect Marxist political practice

¹¹ Ibid. p. 2.

¹²As Fleetwood writes on p.4, “This does not imply critical realism is replacing dialectical materialism, it is simply doing something else, it is adding to it.”

and/or Marxist theory?’ If it can’t do that, or in Fleetwood’s terms, if it’s also “erroneous to seek a possible relationship between [Marxist philosophy] and Marxist theory or Marxist political practice,” there’s no ground for further discussion here, nor, even perhaps, any reason or explanation for the existence of a philosophy for Marxism, so we can stop right there. If it *can*, though, then it should be explicated what makes *Marxist* philosophy unique in that it is the *single* available medium between the general realm of philosophies and Marxist political practice.

This notion of philosophies (critical realism, in this case) firstly interacting with (“adding to”) Marxist philosophy and only *then* being able penetrate into Marxist political practice makes any polemical or critical aspect of Marxist philosophy redundant, as there would be no need of defending or attacking against any other philosophy if it is only *Marxist* philosophy that can make an influence on practice. And it could further be argued, that philosophy is *intrinsically* and necessarily polemical, which now (carrying the line of this argument) makes *philosophy* itself completely redundant (not only some aspects of it).

Allow me to caricaturize this to some extent to be able to outline it schematically: If, say, post-modernism, in its long railroad trip for any potential influence to Marxist political practice, arrived at the station of Marxist philosophy and started a polemical discussion and defeated Marxist philosophy. What would now be moving forward on the “track” from the station towards Marxist political practice wouldn’t be a *Marxist* philosophy anyway, thence still the secluded Marxist political practice would stay in safe hands: The security there doesn’t allow outsiders to come in as a principle. Let the image of the “linearity” of this railroad hang in the air for a moment.

The absurdity of this schema, although caricatural, depicts the consequence of Fleetwood's over-emphasized rigidity and intransitivity in his distinctions: While correctly differentiating philosophy, political practice and science, he makes them incommunicable, confining philosophy with such a strictly shielded door to which Marxist philosophy (if it is not completely useless for political practice), can only be said to *contingently* have the keys. Any claim for non-contingency that doesn't concede the polemic and critical aspects of philosophy as essential qualifications of it (and hence Marxist philosophy), would either understand philosophy as ahistorical itself, or have to tie it in with some other eternal, ahistorical, self-justifying, infallible entity, bordering on being a *substance* in the philosophical sense. In (early) Althusser's case, that would become science, as he did in theorizing philosophy as the theory of theoretical practice. Allow me take a breath here, open up a large parenthesis and show the potential outcomes of this.

For Althusser, theoretical practice works on ideological raw material (Generalities I) and transforms it to scientific theory via a set of theoretical tools (generalities II), and strips it of illusions and ideological content and with an epistemological break, finally produces a theory (Generalities III)¹³ sealed by the allegedly undisputable character of mathematics, the lion king of sciences. Althusser doesn't specify the position of the intransitive objects, nor the intransitive dimension when it comes to the process of the social production of scientific theories. The key point here is that the objects of scientific practice are presented only as ideas, as

¹³Louis Althusser, *For Marx* (Penguin Press, 1969), 184.

concepts, and this culminates in a form of what Bhaskar calls “scientific rationalism”¹⁴ carried through Spinoza, which Althusser would later classify himself as a “theoreticist = rationalist-speculative”¹⁵ standpoint in his *Essays in Self-Criticism*. Collier writes,

“Althusser says almost nothing about the relations between theories produced by a science, ‘the object in thought’, or ‘object of knowledge,’ and what they are about, ‘the real object.’ ... He ends up leaving us looking for the mechanism that brings it about that its product is knowledge, on analogy with the mechanisms of social reproduction that bring it about that what is reproduced is a society; but society is not society by virtue of its relation to some one thing that is not itself society; knowledge is knowledge by virtue of its relation to its real object.”¹⁶

With Althusser’s formulation, it is difficult to defend the *fallibility* of science (the alternatives of which are dogmatism and judgemental relativism, as opposed to epistemic relativism and judgemental rationalism)¹⁷ and the significant services of

¹⁴Roy Bhaskar, *Philosophy and the Idea of Freedom* (London: Routledge 2011), 178.

¹⁵Louis Althusser, *Essays in Self-Criticism* (New Left Books 1976), 68.

¹⁶Andrew Collier, *Critical Realism: An Introduction to Roy Bhaskar's Philosophy* (London: Verso, 1994), 52.

¹⁷Together with “ontological realism,” these last two terms form the “holy trinity” of critical realism.

Epistemic relativism represents the historical, socially produced, fallible and changing character of all science, nestling it in a socio-historical epistemic context. We know since a certain stage of the development of biology that characteristics such as intrepidity and combat ability on the battlefield are not genetically passed over to the infant from the parents, and it is highly possible that Einsteinian physics will one day be sublated or shown to be false altogether. This is how critical realism counterposes dogmatism. *Judgemental rationalism* defends the ability to rationally choose between two competing scientific theories by evaluating their empirical validity and explanatory powers. Thus we can choose between Freudian interpretation of dreams vs.

empirical research in it and to show what it is good for. We can now close the parenthesis and grab the hanging image of *linearity* and pull it down with Althusser's self-critique (*italics mine*):

“...the definition of philosophy as a theory of theoretical practice (given in *For Marx* and again in Part One of *Reading Capital*) is *unilateral* and therefore inaccurate. In this case, it is not merely a question of terminological ambiguity, but one of an error in the conception itself. To define philosophy in a unilateral way as the Theory of theoretical practices (and in consequence as a Theory of the differences between the practices) is a formulation that could not help but induce either 'speculative' or 'positivist' theoretical effects and echoes.”¹⁸

In Fleetwood's formulation, the relation was linear in that critical realism can only indulge in broader horizons through the medium of Marxist philosophy, and in Althusser's, it is unilateral in that it can only relate to science (or scientific practice).

Aristotelean dream theory on rational grounds. This is how critical realism counterposes judgemental relativism (contemporarily in the form of theories of “incommensurability” or post-modern theories rejecting the category of truth altogether). Note that neither would be possible without an *ontological realism* in that if there were no existentially intransitive, real objects of science, then dogmatism and absolute relativism would be possible because if theory is not about something other than itself, there would be no chance, ground or need for a reality check. For example, Newtonian physics wouldn't need an Einsteinian sublation if there were no objects moving close to the speed of light nor quantum mechanics if it weren't for sub-atomic particles. If light weren't thought to be a real, existentially intransitive object of science, no case for the scientific validity of quantum mechanics or theories of relativity could be made against Newton. All scientific polemic would just be “my word against yours,” not “my word against yours about the same object.” This is why the three concepts form a *trinity*.

¹⁸Louis Althusser and Étienne Balibar, *Reading Capital* (New Left Books 1970), 8.

I think the “speculative” effects and echoes mentioned here, would correspond to the observation of *contingency* above. Althusser’s later definition of philosophy as “representing the people’s class struggle in theory”¹⁹ and as “strictly speaking, having no object, in the sense that a science has an object,”²⁰ opens room for philosophy (non-Marxist and logically anti-Marxist included) to be able to relate to political practice and scientific theory more freely, and also emphasizes the intrinsically polemical side of it.

3. Some Examples of Relations Between Philosophy, Scientific Practice and Political Practice

Now, removing the *contingency* of the role yielded to *Marxist* philosophy exclusively (among the general realm of philosophy), we can pursue the debate on interaction in more general terms. If we go back a little and read the above quotations in italics without the parenthesis, “*There is ... no one-to-one mapping between a particular political practice, a particular theory and a particular philosophy,*” Fleetwood will take us to a crucial point about the “one-to-one mapping”: The absence of such a mapping is not only true for Marxism particularly, but is so in general as well. Although this helps us be alert on not committing the *epistemic fallacy*, as in, understanding being only in terms of our knowledge of being, I believe it could have been beneficial to be more cautious about extending this metaphor of “one-to-one mapping” to “relationship.”

¹⁹Louis Althusser, *Lenin and Philosophy and Other Essays* (London: Monthly Review Press 1971), 21.

²⁰*Ibid*, p. 56.

From the absence of a one-to-one mapping, which I take to mean something like “perfectly fitting in all sockets,” it does *not* entail that the three areas, namely, political practice, scientific theory and philosophy, separated by a descriptive distinction which Fleetwood presumably borrows from Louis Althusser, are non-associable in any way, that they are not open to interaction with each other. It is one thing to assert that any transformative social activity aimed at the capitalist state is fundamentally different in character than formulating the tendency of the rate of profit to fall in the British Museum, or from asking the question “What are the conditions of the possibilities of this knowledge?” but another thing to claim there is no ground whatsoever on which these practices can influence each other (if we are able to consider influences, interactions, effects etc. as types of “relationships”).

It is only natural to presume that a relationship *is* possible between any philosophy of science and science without falling into any equalizing traps. The history of science is very rich in examples for this. Collier is simply stating empirical facts when writing that

“the history of economic theory, for instance, while it is marked by a number of theoretical breaks, is marked by the philosophical character of those breaks ... The persistence of philosophical constraints on work in the human sciences partly explains – given the plurality of philosophies – the pluralism of contesting theories that prevails in these disciplines. For instance, not only positivism but also existential phenomenology has set up colonies on the terrain of psychology.”²¹

Nevertheless, this does not exhaust the potentials of philosophy as to what it can relate with. Critical realism can *effect* (not absolutely determine) how one (person, or

²¹ Andrew Collier, *Critical Realism: An Introduction to Roy Bhaskar's Philosophy* (London: Verso, 1994), 207.

organization) could take political action, or which political programme they could pursue among some alternatives. I should be cautious as well, though: These effects might never be prescriptive. That, critical realism argues, is a potentiality of *explanatory critiques*, meaning sciences. But just to give a casual example, any defensible and comprehensive refutation of say, methodological individualism or social determinism in the human sciences, could be put to use to equip oneself against vulgar liberal propaganda and a leftist politics of endist classism respectively. It is still possible that when you go talk to some certain factions of the left about feminism, you would hear things on the lines of ‘Oh sure, domestic labour is essentially located in the reproduction of labour-power, so you see, these will all be resolved when the revolution comes, they are just reflections of the contradictions of capitalism’ or read party brochures condemning LGBT politics as ‘representations of the degenerated bourgeoisie life-style.’ This phenomena is mostly due to an understanding of society as a simple, non-differentiated, non-qualified mass, where one certain structure performs under laboratory conditions as if in a closed system. When asked about post-modernism’s assertions of “gender, ethnicity and sexuality” in an interview, Bhaskar responds:

“The postmodern assertions of the politics of identity and difference is in fact very useful. It objects to the homogenizing and commandist structures of the traditional socialist politics ... It is not good enough to treat all oppressed people as if they were uniform members, male members, of the working class. They are all subject to a multiplicity of structures, and they are at the intersection of a multiplicity of sites of power. By treating everyone as equivalent and interchangeable one is aping the instrumentalist rationality that was generated by capitalism.”²²

²²Roy Bhaskar, *From Science to Emancipation: Alienation and the Actuality of Enlightenment* (London: Routledge 2012), 196.

Establishing the multiplicity of those structures in a coherent conception of a deep, stratified and complexly relational social reality was one of theoretical objectives of critical naturalism.

In some exceptional cases, philosophy can in fact even render a whole self-proclaimed scientific inquiry inoperative, if it can succeed in showing that the philosophical premises it rests on, when their extensions are revealed by transcendental argumentation, cannot sustain themselves and make the very practice of that scientific inquiry incomprehensible, therefore exposing its implicit, yet fatal contradictions. Collier gives the example of “experimental psychology [which] is virtually defined by its imitation of the positivist picture of natural science.”²³ Any “scientific” inquiry starting from positivistic assumptions (for instance, a Humean understanding of causality) is prone to falling into such unfortunate tragedy. Yet, the role of critical realism for sciences could be described as defensive rather than aggressive, and besides the occasional serving as a “midwife,” critical realism defines its main relation to science as the humble task of “underlabouring,” a term Bhaskar has borrowed from Locke,²⁴ but as Locke himself has said: “it is ambition enough to be employed as an under-labourer in clearing the ground a little, and removing some of the rubbish that lies in the way to knowledge.”²⁵

Andrew Collier lists among some critical realist interventions to science

²³ Ibid, p. 207.

²⁴ See the 8th footnote of Roy Bhaskar in the preface of *A Realist Theory of Science* (London: Routledge, 2008), xxxi.

²⁵ John Locke, *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding (First Published 1690)* (Pennsylvania State University Press, 1999), 13.

Trevor Pateman (in linguistics), David Will (in psychoanalysis) and Tony Lawson (in economics)²⁶. I could add to that Margaret Archer (in sociology), Bob Jessop and Jonathan Joseph (in political science), Tobin Nellhaus (in cognitive science), Patomaki Heikki (in international relations) and Christopher Norris (in quantum mechanics). There also has blossomed a very promising interaction with the recently more salient critical realist incentive for interdisciplinarity and ecology in the last few years, fruiting two significant essay collections.²⁷ A suitable example outside critical realism but within Marxism could be the relation between Althusser's philosophy and the scientific work of Poulantzas.

I would now like to give a final example of possible relations, this time from medicine, which is for some reason extremely under-theorized by philosophy. Prof. M.D. Canan Efendigil Karatay, in her very influential yet still underrated book whereby she explains the generative mechanisms and structures of human weight gain and loss, writes:

There have been no studies that show that cholesterol directly plugs the arteries. All reported studies are social scans. The famous Framingham study has not been able to show cholesterol as a cause in any way either.

Studies carried out through observations of groups cannot directly prove a causal relation. That is, they cannot scientifically establish that embolism is caused by cholesterol. We call these comprehensive, long-term studies epidemiological studies. Epidemiological studies might be beneficial in researches on

²⁶ Andrew Collier, *Critical Realism: An Introduction to Roy Bhaskar's Philosophy* (London: Verso, 1994), 205-236.

²⁷ See Roy Bhaskar et al., *Interdisciplinarity and Climate Change: Transforming Knowledge and Practice for Our Global Future* (London: Routledge, 2010) and Roy Bhaskar, Karl Georg Hoyer and Petter Naess, (eds.), *Ecophilosophy in a World of Crisis: Critical realism and the Nordic contributions* (London and New York: Routledge 2012)

epidemics but they cannot conclusively prove causal relations in the analysis of chronically degenerative illnesses.

I would like to expound this subject with a few examples. We always see fire trucks in every case of fire, right? So are we going to claim that it is the fire trucks causing the fires? Or, in every traffic accident with serious injuries, an ambulance comes to the scene, right? In that case, should we contend that it is the ambulances that cause the traffic accidents with serious injuries? That they are in the same place at the same time, is not an indication that they cause them! In other words, the existence of cholesterol in the moment and region of illness makes up a bad excuse.²⁸

Now if that isn't the most accurate first-order depiction of the failure of Humean theory of causality, resting on constant conjunctions of events, empirical invariance, patterns and regularities and habit of mind, I don't know what could be! If only Karatay were acquainted with Roy Bhaskar's philosophy, she could have made a more definitive, conclusive case, and in fact, such is the task that now lies right in front of critical realists, and such issues in science, natural or social alike, are in serious need of philosophical "underlabouring."

A restatement should now follow the preservations listed in the opening of this section: Just as Marxism cannot be reduced to science, critical realism can be thought not only in relation to other philosophies of science, nor any science, but also political practice, and it is in fact building, or rather, revealing this bridge (in resituating reasons as causes and moving from facts to oughts) lies one of the major accomplishments of critical realism. Additionally, the relationship between critical realism (or philosophy) and political practice is not merely possible through the mediation of an ever-present discourse on science, even if some philosophies of

²⁸Prof. Dr. Canan Efendigil Karatay, *Karatay Diyeti'yle Yaşam Boyu Sağlık: Şişmanlığa Elveda, Mutluluğa Merhaba!*, (Istanbul: Haykitap 2011) 133-134.

scientific practice is the starting point of a transcendental argumentation and immanent critique. The questions this might arise will be easier to deal with the dialectic turn. Quoting Bhaskar, “How then can I treat of theory generally, or by what right do I identify it as a subset of the domain of the real, or indeed envelop in my critique philosophies—including epistemologies—which do not purport to be about science?”²⁹ It will turn out that, after all, critical realists, after the theory of explanatory critiques and the critique of “Hume’s law” which forbids the actually legitimate and in fact logically necessary movement from the “Is” to the “Ought”, but even more freely after the dialectical turn, *can* “talk about good and evil.”³⁰ I will not be able to get into this in this section. With the dialecticisation of critical realism, its extensions to emancipatory politics will be more apparent in the issue of ethics, which I will briefly discuss in the concluding section regarding this turn and its potential implications.

4. Marxism, Materialism, Idealism

Now let me return to Fleetwood and another one of his interesting remarks, which is that Marxism has never had a full blown philosophy, and that many of its philosophical adversaries were in fact full blown. He defines this useful concept:

“focus[ing] neither on one, or a small number, of topics in the philosophy of science, but is wide ranging, covering topics such as: ontology, epistemology, modes of inference, nature of causality, nature of laws/tendencies, role of abstraction, distinction between essence and appearance, criterion for theory evaluation, and so on.

²⁹ Roy Bhaskar, *Dialectic: The Pulse of Freedom* (London and New York: Routledge, 2008), 13.

³⁰ See Alan Norrie, “The Scene and the Crime: Can Critical Realists Talk about Good and Evil?” *Journal of Critical Realism* 11.1 (2012): 76.

For brevity, I refer to such all-encompassing philosophy of science as *full-blown*. And critical realism is a full-blown philosophy of science.”³¹

I think we need to approach this remark with caution, as hypothetical depictions of philosophical deprivation or complaints such as “Marx hasn’t lived long enough” might be unfair, and not to Marxism, but to idealism.

Idealism has been very generous to Marxism throughout their history. And when Marxism’s non-full-blown philosophical positions were challenged extensively enough, the resulting stations were full-blown idealisms. There could be several examples mentioned for this indebtedness of Marxism as arguably from Engels one could reach residues of Locke and Hume. This way of thinking could be generalized to a potentiality for future as well: A transcendental questioning like that of Bhaskar’s has the potential to carry out a non-fully elaborated set of philosophical propositions into full blown ones, as in pointing out their directions in various passage ways and making them subject to immanent critique. The questions which can lead us from *Materialism and Empirio-criticism* to positivism for instance are arguably of a transcendental character. Let me finish the discussion of this concept of “full blownness” by admitting that it’s not easy to disagree with the empirical validity of Fleetwood’s remark. Marxism has indeed been lacking in a ready-at-hand, actualized form of a full blown materialist philosophy.

Steve Fleetwood carries on his case for a “happy marriage” with a discussion

³¹ Andrew Brown, Steve Fleetwood and John Michael Roberts, “The Marriage of Critical Realism and Marxism: Happy, Unhappy or on the Rocks?” in Andrew Brown, Steve Fleetwood and John Michael Roberts, (eds.), *Critical Realism and Marxism* (London and New York: Routledge 2012), 3.

of the ontological categories of critical realism such as tendencies, laws, structures, powers, generative mechanisms and so on. Now, I will turn to John Michael Roberts's thesis that "Marxism does not require the services of critical realism."

III. A PHILOSOPHY FOR MARXISM & "MARXIST FOUNDATIONS"

1. The Status of Historical Materialism & *Marxist* philosophy of science or Marxist *Philosophy of Science?* (2)

The question comes up again, but unlike Fleetwood, Roberts starts with an explicit and direct differentiation of the two that doesn't require following any argumentative line on our part, and writes:

Obviously if Marxism is to expand its horizons then it is legitimate to use the ideas of other theories and philosophies. However, there is a crucial difference between incorporating these ideas within Marxism, but changing their form and content in line with Marxism (a *Marxist* philosophy of science), and developing a full-blown theoretical paradigm and then assessing the extent to which Marxism is compatible with that paradigm (a Marxist *philosophy of science*).³²

Further on the same page, he criticizes Fleetwood for not starting from the fundamentals of Marxism but somewhere else, and lists historical materialism and its "application" to capitalism as exemplified in Marx's *Capital* as those fundamentals. The problem here is firstly that historical materialism itself is not a "philosophy" *proper* in Roberts's formulation and we could call it a science, as Althusser and his

³²Ibid, p. 10.

theoretical comrades do, a “method” as Lukacs does, or like Bhaskar does, situate it somewhere in-between and specify it as a “research programme.” There are, however, some slight discrepancies within the these philosophers’ own approaches to the concept as well: For example, according to Althusser, it is “the science of social formations”³³ in the glossary of the English publication of *Reading Capital* (checked by Althusser himself) while it is the “science of history”³⁴ in the main body of the book, and according to Bhaskar, it could be referred to as a research programme itself³⁵ or as something that can “generate” research programmes:

“like any other fundamental metaphysical blueprint or paradigm in science, historical materialism can only be justified by its fruitfulness in generating research programmes capable of yielding sequences of theories, progressively richer in explanatory power.”³⁶

We need to go a little deeper into such definitions and specifications of historical materialism here. Roberts gives us a very brief description: “Historical materialism is premised, at the simplest level, upon the idea that societies progress through distinctive modes of production.”³⁷ I believe that this is a too generic and ambiguous definition even in the “simplest level,” because “progressing through” can come to mean almost anything and doesn’t come close to the crucial aspects of

³³Louis Althusser and Étienne Balibar, *Reading Capital* (New Left Books 1970), 313.

³⁴Ibid, p. 136.

³⁵Roy Bhaskar, “General Introduction,” in *Critical Realism: Essential Readings*, ed. Margaret Archer et al. (London: Routledge 1998), xx

³⁶Roy Bhaskar, “*Reclaiming Reality*,” (London: Routledge 2011), 82.

³⁷Andrew Brown, Steve Fleetwood and John Michael Roberts, “The Marriage of Critical Realism and Marxism: Happy, Unhappy or on the Rocks?” in Andrew Brown, Steve Fleetwood and John Michael Roberts, (eds.), *Critical Realism and Marxism* (London and New York: Routledge 2012), 2.

what it aspires to describe, which lies in exactly what kind of relations modes of production have with societies. It must have included a little more specification, and could have touched upon some characteristics of that relation such as “conditioning,” “determining,” “determining in the last instance,” or “determining the dominant element” etc., as various Marxists and in fact Marx and Engels themselves have done in different manners in different periods of their intellectual lives, and this equivocacy is more apparent when contrasted with Bhaskar’s short definition: “Historical materialism asserts the causal primacy of men’s and women’s mode of production and reproduction of their natural (physical) being, or of the labour process more generally, in the development of human history.”³⁸

However, it is anyway a general admission that the conceptual framework of historical materialism in Marx and Engels’s works themselves has varied often in the whole of their oeuvre. To list just a few:

1. It [The materialist conception of history] shows that circumstances make men just as much as men make circumstances.³⁹
2. Men make their own history, but they do not make it as they please; they do not make it under self-selected circumstances, but under circumstances existing already, given and transmitted from the past. The tradition of all dead generations weighs like a nightmare on the brains of the living.⁴⁰

³⁸Roy Bhaskar, *“Reclaiming Reality,”* (London: Routledge 2011), 125.

³⁹Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, *The German Ideology (Includes: Theses on Feuerbach and the Introduction to the Critique of Political Economy)* (New York: Prometheus Books, 1998), 62.

⁴⁰Karl Marx, *The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte* (Moscow: Progress Publishers 1937), 10.

3. The mode of production of material life conditions the general process of social, political and intellectual life. It is not the consciousness of men that determines their existence, but their social existence that determines their consciousness.⁴¹

It should also be noted that both Althusser⁴² and Bhaskar cite Engels's famous letter trying to correct some issues with determination, where he puts forward the formulation that economy is the "ultimately"⁴³ [in the last instance] determining element, but not the only determining one. While, in the first reference above, there's no emphasis on any priority of either men over circumstances or vice versa, in the second, we have the image of 'providing the raw material to work on' and the objectivity (as in existential independence) of the social conditions that have attained their contemporary concreteness through history, and in the third, although the relation at the outset is that of a "conditioning," similar to the theme of the second, we finally reach a relation of determination as well. We are not only dealing with conceptual differences among separate works, we are dealing with such a fundamental and categorical difference in just adjacent sentences, between conditioning and determination (of course, the crudeness of such a determination is dependent upon the ingredients of what is called "social existence.") And from there,

⁴¹Karl Marx, *A Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy* (Moscow: Progress Publishers) accessed September 23, 2000, <http://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1850/pol-econ/preface.htm>

⁴²Louis Althusser, *For Marx*, (Penguin Press 1969), 117.

⁴³F. Engels, Letter to J.Bloch, 21 September 1890, Marx-Engels Selected Works, Vol. II, Lawrence & Wishart, London, 1968, p. 692 quoted in Roy Bhaskar, *Reclaiming Reality*, (London: Routledge 2011), 201.

Marx goes on to sketch how the development of forces of production comes into conflict with the relations of production and start an “era of social revolution.” It is overtly this last assertion of Marx that Roberts subscribes to as he gives a similar brief outline:

A mode of production is characterised by the unity of forces of production (those instruments through which concrete, everyday human labour produces useful products) with the relations of production (the form which labour takes for it to engender surplus extraction within historical periods). When class societies are the object of analytical attention then the relationship between forces and relations of production assumes a contradictory unity because this relationship is defined primarily through opposing class forces that encapsulate a form of exploitation.⁴⁴

Yet, our ambiguities aren’t over. For instance, William H. Shaw’s dictionary entry on historical materialism lists 3 different types of employment of the term “mode of production” by Marx, ranging from “the technical nature or manner of producing” to “the social system (or manner or mode) of producing, which is carried on within, and as a result of, a certain set of ownership relations” and to “both the technical and social properties of the way production proceeds.”⁴⁵

From there, Roberts directly moves on to shortly summarize the contradictions within the capitalist mode of production and commodity fetishism, which actually had little to do with the subject at hand, because they were pertaining to an explanatory critique of a certain mode of production that Marx

⁴⁴Andrew Brown, Steve Fleetwood and John Michael Roberts, “The Marriage of Critical Realism and Marxism: Happy, Unhappy or on the Rocks?” in Andrew Brown, Steve Fleetwood and John Michael Roberts, (eds.), *Critical Realism and Marxism* (London and New York: Routledge 2012), 11.

⁴⁵William H. Shaw, “Historical Materialism,” in *A Dictionary of Marxist Thought*, ed. Tom Bottomore et al. (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing 2001), 236.

groundbreakingly accomplished in *Capital*. The point is, *Capital* was not a pure work of historical materialism as such, nor an exemplary application of it, as its object was primarily not a social formation in Althusserian terms, which consists of political practice, ideological practice and economical practice, nor “societies (or a society)” in Roberts’ terms, but *a mode of production*, which can exhaust only the last one of the components of social formations, or just one stratum, one instance, one order, one aspect of a dialectically cemented totality or whatever term Roberts would like, in societies (otherwise we would commit the fault of reductionism: of society to whatever term preferred above.) And if we would choose to stick to the Althusserian framework, it only “can exhaust”, because a certain economic practice can be a specified –in space and time– complex of different modes of production, such as feudalism and capitalism, as Balibar writes:

Capital, which expounds the abstract theory of the capitalist mode of production, does not undertake to analyse concrete social formations which generally contain several different modes of production, whose laws of coexistence and hierarchy must therefore be studied. The problem is only implicitly and partially contained in the analysis of ground rent (Volume Three); it is only present practically in Marx's historical and political works (*The Eighteenth Brumaire*, etc.)⁴⁶

Now we can see from his literature (including the *Capital*) that it was obvious to Marx that the state, for example, was not an isolated, excluded entity from the capitalist mode of production, but was rooted within it via providing the very reproduction of it. However, we must remember that Marx never got to write his book focusing on the state, as he was planning to. Marx did write a lot on society in

⁴⁶Louis Althusser and Étienne Balibar, *Reading Capital* (New Left Books 1970), 207.

general and the role of economy in societies, and they are what exactly comprise historical materialism, but as Bhaskar argues, they were “underdeveloped” relative to his comprehensive scientific analysis of the capitalist mode of production, namely his “critique of political economy”.⁴⁷

There is no question whatsoever that *Capital* provides excellent scientific tools for the explanation of the misery, wars, hunger, cycles of crisis that is present in capitalist societies, but it should be remarked that it is essentially different, for example, than Poulantzas’s analysis of the rise of fascism in Germany⁴⁸, or discussions among the left in Turkey regarding whether Turkey was a fully capitalist state yet or not in the 60s-70s. Antonio Gramsci’s surprise about the Soviets, encapsulated in the title of his famous article, “*The Revolution Against Das Kapital*,” was therefore uncalled for, because as Bhaskar points out: “In any event, subject-matter of *Capital* is not human praxis, but the structures, relations, contradictions and tendencies of the capitalist mode of production.”⁴⁹ It is therefore unfair to expect from the *Capital* at what stage, within which conditions, and where will capitalism fail to defer the fatal effects of contradictions internal to its structure in a given social formation and be overcome by a socialist revolution, which is very much dependent on the transformative action of social agents, as Bhaskar contends: “Such structures may come to be transformed through the theoretically and practically transformed transformative praxis of the agents who were reproducing

⁴⁷Roy Bhaskar, “General Introduction,” in *Critical Realism: Essential Readings*, ed. Margaret Archer et al. (London: Routledge 1998), xx

⁴⁸See Nicos Poulantzas, *Fascism and Dictatorship: The Third International and the Problem of Fascism* (London: Verso 1979).

⁴⁹Roy Bhaskar, *Philosophy and the Idea of Freedom* (London: Routledge 2011), 164.

them.”⁵⁰ Furthermore, this reproduction and/or transformation happens among a vast multiplicity of conditions, which might be surprisingly contingent and external to society too, as Bhaskar’s formulation of the transformational model of social activity holds “The possibility of endogenous (e.g. in virtue of the possession of auto-subversive tendencies by a structure), as well as exogenous, sources of change.”⁵¹ In short, society is as “open” a system as it could get.

Up to this point, I have tried to show that the ambiguities revolving around Roberts’s understanding of historical materialism (and around the concept itself) and the subject matter of Marx’s explanatory critique in *Capital* has caused him to mistakenly see the latter as an application of the former (whereas it was only very limitedly so), and decorate “historical materialism” as such with the incarnated powers to serve as an embodied scientific foundation to Marxism. I think the empirical lack of serious works of historical materialism as a research programme comparable to the scope of *Capital* (as the scientific theory of a distinct mode of production) inhibits us from claiming maybe not the potential powers of such a service, but the current incarnation of them at hand. As Roy Bhaskar says, when responding to a question after a talk on Marxism and Critical Realism, this foundation is not complete:

“When I said that Marx’s analysis of the capitalist mode of production was fundamentally correct, I did not mean that Marxism was complete. Marxism is very far from complete. It contains huge lacunae, and it is our job, in so far as we identify with Marxism as a research and political programme, to identify its lacunae, to identify its tensions and weaknesses and to remedy them as Marx

⁵⁰Roy Bhaskar, *The Possibility of Naturalism: A Philosophical Critique of the Contemporary Human Sciences* (London: Routledge 1998), 195-196.

⁵¹Ibid, p. 193.

would have by recourse to a greater totality.”⁵²

But we have not even asked the main question yet.

2. Marxist Science?

More relevantly for my criticism, it should be remembered that it wouldn't be plausible to conceive historical realism as a philosophy per se from Roberts's description and “science” or “research programme” have to suffice in his terms as well. Then, what does it mean for a specific science (or research programme) to be a foundation for a *Marxist* philosophy of science? It is not good enough for Roberts to have any philosophy of science (or social science) that is compatible with the scientific practices of Marxists, but they have to originate from the premises of “Marxist foundations.” Now let's go back to what Roberts had to say against Fleetwood:

In his chapter, for example, SF [Steve Fleetwood] first sets out critical realist arguments and then fits Marx into those arguments. To flag up one illustration, in SF's chapter, he presents an argument for the transformational model of social action (TMSA) (the critical realist argument concerning structure and agency), and then shows how Marx's ideas fit with the TMSA. But notice here that he does not begin by first exploring the fundamentals of Marxism itself. This neglect means that he does not consider the extent to which Marx's own insights are defective. Nor does he consider, first, the extent to which Marx's own categories may be extended and developed to take account of other social forms of life beyond the strictly 'economic' without the need for a full-blown critical realist philosophy of science.

Roberts then lists Voloshinov's work on linguistics and Pashukanis's work on legal

⁵²Roy Bhaskar, *From Science to Emancipation: Alienation and the Actuality of Enlightenment* (London: Routledge 2012), 69.

theory as examples of such inquiry. I think there's an explicit failure to distinguish works of philosophies of science (in this case) from works of social theory here. Both linguistics and legal theory might be promising lands for extensions of historical materialism's central themes (leaving the controversies around them aside for the moment), but it is difficult to see in this any viable criticism that doesn't conflate either linguistics and legal theory or historical materialism with philosophies of science. Assuming there's no point to argue about their distinctions, let me move on to my point about Roberts' emphasis on *Marxist* philosophy of science rather than Marxist *philosophy of science*.

Firstly, Roberts could argue that social sciences cannot be philosophically conceived in similar ways to natural sciences, and even if Bhaskar makes a very tenable case to refute that, lets not even try to hold a critical naturalist position and to Roberts's advantage, take the philosophies of social sciences as categorically distinct (from natural sciences) as objects of philosophical study. We are now left with only social sciences vs. historical materialism.

Now if we concede to a convention that social science is a broader category than historical materialism (as seen by Roberts) and encompasses it, which basically means there are social sciences other than those belonging to Marxism, we would then have to concede to logic that *any* philosophy of social science that can adequately provide an account of and embrace social sciences should consequently be able to pull off the same for historical materialism. Continuing, for Roberts's caveat or tenet to have any tangible substance at all, we must assert that *not all adequate philosophies of social science are congruent with the scientific theories within Marxism*, as otherwise there would be no problem regarding whether we start

from a philosophy of social science in general (one that is not Marxist by definition) and then fit Marxism into it or start from Marxist foundations (historical realism) to extend its pillars to construct a philosophy of social science, which is a case Roberts makes *in principle*, prior to any consideration of the adequacy of those philosophies. And that would demarcate Marxism from not only other human and/or social sciences (which would be a very innocent analytical operation) but from the general category of social science, and leave it in an absolute vacuum, an unequivocal isolation. We now can talk about to no scientific content in historical materialism or Marxism. So this line of thought doesn't work. Let's try another one.

If we *don't*, on the other hand, concede to the convention that social science is a broader category than historical materialism (as seen by Roberts) and encompasses it, that would basically mean that no other science can be viable and that society in general is limited to the scientific object of historical realism, and whether this object (or these objects) is defined as social formations, history, a certain mode of production, the material production of life or interactions of humans with nature, we would have to commit the fallacy of reductionism in some way or another. The objects of one scientific theory cannot exhaust the whole of ontology (and conceding to Roberts an anti-positivist naturalist position, social reality) because there are multiple generative mechanisms, structures, powers, power relations and their interrelations not only in nature but in social life as well, otherwise we could not make sense of Roberts' own practice of penning a philosophical article (he should try exhaustively explaining that with the "foundations of Marxism" aka historical materialism), and this was the immanent critique of philosophies of social science Roy Bhaskar carried out in *The Possibility*

of Naturalism and Scientific Realism and Human Emancipation.

If, however, *the real objects* of historical materialism are not claimed to exhaust *social reality*, to claim that historical materialism still exhausts the sphere of social science (that there is no room for any other social science) would have show how historical materialism *refutes* every other single social science that we have at the moment (rendering them pseudo-sciences), but we would then have either formulate philosophically how a science could refute another one that doesn't have the same objects of inquiry or convert historical materialism into an all-encompassing magical entity such as the hyperbolic diamat of Stalin: The Universal Unity of Philosophy, Science and World-outlook of His Majesty.⁵³

Let me give an example about this: If Roberts is serious about his requirement that a philosophy of social science has to start from the scientific foundations of Marxism, he has to either show

- a. that the social phenomena called homosexuality could be reduced to the mode of production, to economy or to the relations between economy and social formations or anything along similar lines, according to what specified definition Roberts would choose to have on the objects of historical materialism, or
- b. how (paraphrasing from Roberts) the contradiction that arises between the forces of production and relations of production at a certain level of the development of the former in class societies can provide the epistemic

⁵³For a portrayal of the dismal outcomes of such an inflation from a critical realist perspective, see Vefa Saygın Ögütle's polemical article: V.S. Ögütle, *Politzer'i Okumak*, Emrah Göker's blog, April 2, 2011, <http://istifhanem.com/2011/04/02/politzeriokumak-vefa/>

key to understand whether homosexuality is primarily a sexual *orientation*, a sexual *preference* or a genetic tendency or a combination of these or any other elements.

Let me now look at some other options that were present to Roberts. One could also have expected from Roberts to take the Lukacsean road and make a case for “Proletarian science,” directing his challenge to the fact that Bhaskar takes “non-proletarian science” seriously, but that itself would have consequences of its own, and he would have to alter his understanding of the foundations of Marxism (quoted above), which would have to be defined in terms of a methodology:

We must strive to turn historical materialism into the authentic method for carrying out concrete historical research and historiography in general ... What is historical materialism? It is no doubt scientific method by which to comprehend the events of the past and to grasp their true nature. In contrast to the historical methods of the bourgeoisie, however, it also permits us to view the present historically and hence scientifically so that we can penetrate beneath the surface and perceive the profounder historical forces which in reality control events.⁵⁴

In that case, if we were to somehow converge Roberts’s conception of historical materialism by force to that of a method (or methodology), that would have to situate it within the realm of philosophy. And then demanding *in principle* to take those “fundamental metaphysical blueprints” as preliminary steps for any other potential/possible philosophy of social science would fall under the basic definition of dogmatism, as it is now not science vs. philosophy but philosophy vs. philosophy: The fight has to take place on equal terms, a polemical criteria that Fleetwoods also

⁵⁴Georg Lukacs, *History and Class Consciousness: Studies in Marxist Dialectics* (Britain: Merlin Press 1971) 223-224.

failed to meet in denying from critical realism the influential/extensional powers “Marxist philosophy” had, as I tried to show in the previous chapter. Now Roberts *does* nestle the philosophical bedrock of Marxism in Hegelianism, but still seems to try to maintain in historical materialism as Marx’s “*theoretical and methodological insights*”⁵⁵ (italics mine) something that oversteps the boundaries of philosophy.

This chapter on Roberts up to now was all just to show how his stipulations of “*starting from Marxist foundations*” boils down to a form of dogmatism, attached to his understanding of historical materialism as the *Deus sive Natura* of either social science or philosophy: as a Spinozian God that infinitely exhausts.

Roberts could object to all this and say, “Well, what I meant was [which in fact wasn’t] that since Bhaskar uses transcendental argumentation and starts from experimental science and social science in general, he could as well have started exclusively from Marxism.” But then we would have to remind him that Bhaskar’s transcendental questions, crudely put, do not take the form of “What must the world be like if such and such scientific theory is *true*?” but rather, “What must the world be like if such and such scientific *practice* is *possible*?” From here we can tread on: There simply cannot be inconsistent ontologies pertaining to different social sciences, and if the different scientific practices *presuppose* substantially different and incoherent conditions of possibilities of themselves, then that would be the task of philosophy to thrust out a helping hand and provide critiques for and of them towards the resolutions of such contradictions. It is about time now to move on to

⁵⁵Andrew Brown, Steve Fleetwood and John Michael Roberts, “The Marriage of Critical Realism and Marxism: Happy, Unhappy or on the Rocks?” in Andrew Brown, Steve Fleetwood and John Michael Roberts, (eds.), *Critical Realism and Marxism* (London and New York: Routledge 2012), 11.

the next line of Roberts' criticism towards critical realism, the one regarding the Kantian inheritance, where I will get into the structure of transcendental argumentation in more detail.

IV. ON THE KANTIAN INHERITANCE OF CRITICAL REALISM

Roberts, in the section titled "Philosophical Legacies" in his article, develops a critique towards critical realism on the grounds that it is marked by a strong Kantian legacy, while for Marxism on the other hand, the philosophical pillar is, and should be, Hegel.

In this chapter, I will not attempt to provide a transcendental realist critique of Kant, or his empirical realism and transcendental idealism. That was what most of the scientific realist theoretical enterprise contrived by works such as *A Realist Theory of Science* and *Scientific Realism and Human Emancipation* and various articles published elsewhere. I will just remind that transcendental realism *is* in part a critique of Kant or even more so, of neo-Kantian accounts of science with empirical realist and transcendental idealist residues, and argue that the so called Kantian legacy of Bhaskar lies almost wholly in the method of transcendental argumentation which starts from substantially different premises to come to substantially different conclusions in the works of Bhaskar and Kant. I will try to pinpoint where Roberts's lack of an accurate understanding of the problematic of Kant and the critical realist premises rise to surface.

1. Philosophical Legacy: A mode of argumentation

Roberts writes:

At a minimum, therefore, Kant argued that reason is an active and creative capacity of human beings. As a result Kant also insisted, contra empiricists, that reason imposes order and unity upon the diverse and random features of the world. Even at an intuitive level we know that we daily make connections between discrete phenomena and impose necessary and universal laws upon the world. Thus for Kant reason must have an organising capacity which goes beyond mere experience.⁵⁶

A clarification here seems necessary: For Kant, our intuition (which supplies the forms for perception: time and space) and understanding (which supplies the categories such as causality, necessity, plurality etc.) *are* located somewhere beyond the realm of phenomena, but when it comes to knowledge, or making synthetic a priori judgements, our intellect (or its organizing capacity) cannot go (as in reach out, extend, trespass) beyond experience, it *constitutes* it. Kant, in his transcendental dialectic, posits that reason aspires and endeavours to do transcend but this is bound to stay as a vain attempt for knowledge. Or, in other words, whatever it is that results in such a transcending procedure of our intellect cannot be deemed knowledge. Knowledge can only be of empirical objects, and our cognition of them is marked and thus limited twice by the our minds: For knowledge, we necessarily deploy the categories of our understanding to structure what we experience, and perception is itself necessarily constituted by our pure forms of intuition, namely space and time. The topology of phenomena and noumena in Kant doesn't allow for the image of such a *line* to be crossed by reason in the quest for knowledge, because our objects of

⁵⁶Andrew Brown, Steve Fleetwood and John Michael Roberts, "The Marriage of Critical Realism and Marxism: Happy, Unhappy or on the Rocks?" in Andrew Brown, Steve Fleetwood and John Michael Roberts, (eds.), *Critical Realism and Marxism* (London and New York: Routledge 2012), 12.

knowledge are still things, only not as they are in themselves but as we structure them. Now this patently indicates a fundamental difference, but not as in two separate horizontally adjacent continents, nor as in different vertical ontological strata. To put it *very* crudely, the difference between what we can know a thing to be like and what it in reality is, is more like the difference between that of dough and cookies, than between that of General Iroh's⁵⁷ *pai sho* set and the Spirit World where only the Avatars and a few spiritually matured wise people (General Iroh, the Dragon of the West being one among them) can cross over. Following the dough-cookie metaphor, Kant seems to limit the power of reason to transcend to the analysis of the cook, the kitchen tools and the oven, not to the dough itself⁵⁸. It is very dangerous to pursue such metaphors when it comes to Kant, so I should stop here and leave it to him. Kant in fact describes this scientific venture to "go beyond" as based on a necessary (inevitable) illusion:

"We have previously proved that we can think only through categories and the concepts derived from them, but that our cognition (a priori) with them can reach no farther than to objects of possible experience. Now sciences come forward - psychology, cosmology, theology - that promise this,"⁵⁹

which he tries to write off as pseudo-sciences in so far as they purport to be scientific without recognizing their confinement within possible experience. So there is some

⁵⁷A wonderful character of the wonderful animated TV series, *Avatar: The Last Airbender*.

⁵⁸This has comprised a basis for Schulze's sceptical criticism, in that it is pretty contingent that one can formulate the transcendental structures of the mind but not postulate on the thing in itself, as they are both settled in the realm of noumena in Kant's metaphysics. See Schulze, "Aenesidemus," in *Between Kant and Hegel, Texts in the Development of Post-Kantian Idealism* (Indianapolis: Hackett 2000).

⁵⁹Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason* (Cambridge University Press 1998), 384.

entanglement about Roberts' account of Kant. And the same goes for his account of Kant's relation to critical realism:

There are a number of reasons why critical realism can be situated within a Kantian legacy. In the first instance, critical realism is a transcendental social theory. At its simplest, transcendental realism aims to identify the underlying causal powers of objects.⁶⁰

Firstly, transcendental philosophical argumentation does not automatically elicit an intention to know the underlying causal powers of objects. That is exactly what critical realists contest in Kant and Neo-Kantians: that they haven't actually established the transfactuality of the objects of science, and have stayed at the level of the empirical (and some, at the actual). Secondly, critical realism does not itself "aim to identify the underlying causal powers of objects," but asserts that it is what scientific practices do:

Now philosophy as so conceived, can tell us that it is a condition of the possibility of scientific activities ϕ , ψ , etc. that the world is structured X and differentiated Y. But it cannot tell us what structures it contains or the ways in which it is differentiated. These are entirely matters for substantive scientific investigation.⁶¹

To be able to ponder more on the basic elements of a critical realist critique of empirical realism and transcendental idealism, I need to elaborate the Kantian problematic, and that is what I will try to do in the next section.

⁶⁰Andrew Brown, Steve Fleetwood and John Michael Roberts, "The Marriage of Critical Realism and Marxism: Happy, Unhappy or on the Rocks?" in Andrew Brown, Steve Fleetwood and John Michael Roberts, (eds.), *Critical Realism and Marxism* (London and New York: Routledge 2012), 12-13.

⁶¹Roy Bhaskar, *A Realist Theory of Science* (London: Routledge, 2008), 251.

2. The Scandal of Philosophy

The “scandal of philosophy” has been a popular remark of Kant on the philosophical justification of, or an irrefutable argument about the *reality* of *objects*, or rather, if we need to take the steps slower and be precise, “the existence of things outside us (from which we after all get the whole matter for our cognitions, even for our inner sense).”⁶² Even if we do need to show some caution with a term like “existence” and the image of being “outside” (which, Heidegger will not hesitate to take advantage of), we should also note that Kant has used the expression “*objective reality* of our outer intuition” just on the previous sentence, which makes it easier for us to jump to broader contexts. The reason I say this is that it was not only Kant, being the empirical *realist* he is, who had to deal with skeptics, but *all* realists. I believe, one of Roy Bhaskar’s most important contribution to “materialism” was that he insisted that realism had be defended with a *transcendental* philosophy, hence the name “*transcendental* realism.” I had to use quotation marks around materialism, to make it clear this is *not* the materialism of Engels’s *Anti-Duhring* nor Lenin’s *Materialism and Empirio-criticism*, where there is a clear attempt to repulse the skeptic attack while trying to hang on to the empiricism of Kant and the absolute rationalism of Hegel, ending up with a hybrid metaphysics where all things are both knowable *and* perceptible.

I should note here that there is an apparent tension in Bhaskar’s philosophy and the term materialism because while he is in concordance with it in a most general and humble sense of the term, to be able to clearly distinguish his stance, he

⁶²Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason* (Cambridge University Press 1998), Preface to the Second Edition, 121.

deploys a qualification of it as “synchronic emergent powers materialism” (SEPM) while theorizing his conception of the emergence of mind. SEPM's “main point is that mental powers are emergent powers, not occurring in the absence of matter, but not reducible to material powers.”⁶³ In Bhaskar's own words, it “is in support of a conception of mind as a biologically emergent ensemble of powers of matter with irreducible explanatory principles of its own. [SEPM] is counterposed to reductionist physicalism (e.g. central state materialism) and behaviourism, which collapse those powers to their physical basis and exercise respectively, and to immaterialist dualism (or idealism) which hypostatise (or transcendentise) them.”⁶⁴ The tenet of SEPM is that the emergence of mental powers can be diachronically traced back to its roots in matter via, for instance, a work of evolutionary history, but once they have emerged at one point in our biological development as a species, they cannot synchronically be reduced to physical/chemical relations of material substances. Causal explanations of certain phenomena therefore need to take into account reasons and intentional agency of human beings. Bhaskar in principle sticks to the term “realism” whenever the context of it collides with that of his understanding of materialism (which he purports to be implicit in late Marx's scientific practice), and they do seem to collide often in a specific sense of the term materialism. By this “specific sense,” I especially mean Althusser's interference on it, asserting the materiality of ideas, which would correspond the idea of “reasons as causes” in a Bhaskarian terminology. This simply refers to the fact that our ideas, conceptions, beliefs etc.

⁶³Andrew Collier, *Critical Realism: An Introduction to Roy Bhaskar's Philosophy* (London: Verso, 1994), 156.

⁶⁴Roy Bhaskar, *Scientific Realism and Human Emancipation* (London: Routledge, 2009), 135.

bring about real change to the world. When a chess player decides to go for the Sicilian defence after white's move 1.e4, he reaches out for the round-headed, small and dark-coloured wooden piece sitting on the c7 square of the chess board, picks it up, carries it several centimeters forward, puts it down on the c5 square and finally hits the clock, burning a few calories along the way and perhaps making a pleasant sound that gently vibrates the eardrums of his opponent. Whether an ex-husband holds strong pro-feminist or misogynist convictions might quite literally decide on the life or death of a defenceless Turkish woman. These simple descriptions of action are difficult to explain if the materiality (Althusser) or reality (Bhaskar) of ideas is dismissed or not-fully recognized in favour of a reductionist-practicalist materialism where they serve as epiphenomena, imaginary shadows or reflections of a “material/practical reality” at their best and futile efforts to intransitively separate theory and practice follow. Illusions, just like demystifying explanatory critiques, are real and causally efficacious. Relevantly, David-Hillel Ruben, a proponent of the (Leninist) reflection theory of knowledge, argues that the terms (materialism and realism) can be used interchangeably in his very significant and curiously under-noted work, *Marxism and Materialism*.⁶⁵

Turning back to Kant, as assertive and emphatically put his expression is, it has failed to close matters of metaphysics once and for all, which was, well, to be expected, considering philosophy will never resolve itself. The expression has been used with exactly the opposite content, like Brody's “induction is the glory of

⁶⁵David-Hillel Ruben, *Marxism and Materialism: A Study in Marxist Theory of Knowledge* (London: The Harvester Press 1979), 6.

science but the scandal of philosophy,”⁶⁶ who clearly has taken side with Hume, or a completely different one, as we see in Heidegger. It wasn’t scandalous that philosophy hadn’t yet come up with a convincing vindication of the external world for Heidegger, but that it kept looking and looking. It could be said that he doesn’t “deal” with the question but rather tries to dissolve it. Even though he openly rejects being a realist, it might be argued he is, nonetheless, “aggressively non-anti-realist”, as a committed critical realist, Andrew Collier does:

[Heidegger says] that as ‘Being-in-the-world’ we are ourselves defined by our worlds. The idea that proofs of the ‘external world’ are needed wrongly assumes that we are worldless subjects, defined independently of our worlds. The world indeed is not ‘external’ in that sense at all: we are out in it. Hence, Heidegger admits that ‘doxographically’ – that is, in terms of placing his views on one side or the other in a historical controversy – he is a realist. (*Being and Time*, p. 251).⁶⁷

For Bhaskar on the other hand, “Heidegger does not so much redefine or overcome as evade ‘the scandal of philosophy’”⁶⁸ For him, as Mervyn Hartwig puts it,

“the *real* scandal of philosophy is irrealism and the antrophic fallacy – the exegesis of being in terms of human being, which underpins scepticism and which Hume, Kant, Broad and Heidegger all commit in various ways. The real resolution of the scandal lies in the transcendental deduction of the human capacity for referential detachment.”⁶⁹

The term “transcendental deduction” might naturally sound intimidating to the readers of the *First Critique*, since in the context of Kant, it connotes a colossal philosophical exertion, but it is after all just a method of philosophical

⁶⁶Dunbar Broad, *The Philosophy of Francis Bacon*, (Cambridge University Press 1926)

⁶⁷Andrew Collier, *In Defense of Objectivity and Other Essays*, (London: Routledge 2003), p. 177

⁶⁸Dialectic: The Pulse of Freedom, Roy Bhaskar, Routledge, London 2008, p. 192

⁶⁹Mervyn Hartwig, *Dictionary of Critical Realism*, (London: Routledge 2007), p. 415

argumentation, and it's definitely not patented exclusively by Kant and Kantians. Bhaskar's transcendental deductions are usually shorter and simpler. Referential detachment is simply the detachment of the referent from the reference. How it works and its relevance to the “scandal” requires a lengthy quote from another work of Bhaskar, where he explains the concept clearly and “transcendentally deduces” it:

Quine, Davidson, Putnam and Rorty are all leading contemporary philosophers who would sympathize with Heidegger's diagnosis of the scandal. They would accept, of course, that there is a causally efficacious world ‘out there’ but deny that it is possible to say anything useful about it philosophically; they accept the strictures against ontology—the study of being—that Hume and Kant, as we shall see, deployed. But it is easy to construct a prima facie case for ontology—through the notion of referential detachment. This is the detachment of the act by which we refer to something from that to which it refers, or of reference from referent. Discourse must be about something other than itself, at the very least potentially, for us to be able to refer at all. (Even if it is about itself it must be objectified as a real social entity for us or anyone else to refer to it again—e.g. for the purposes of the clarification of its meaning or the adjudication of its truth.) In the same way, desire must be for something other than itself (that is to say, to use Brentano's phrase, it must have an ‘intentional object’ to which it is internally related) for it to count as desire—even if the desire be for the state of desire. Again, actions must be with something other than themselves (ingredients, tools, words) for the agent to be said to perform an act (cooking a meal, constructing a kitchen, saying ‘well done!’).⁷⁰

In *Dialectic*, Bhaskar also writes that “To someone who doubts whether referential detachment exists just ask them to repeat and/or clarify what they have said, and then ask them what it is that they have repeated or clarified. It must be a referentially detached (social) entity. Any creature capable of differentiation must be capable of

⁷⁰Roy Bhaskar, *Plato Etc.: The Problems of Philosophy and Their Resolution* (London: Routledge 2010), 12.

referential detachment.”⁷¹ That, in very short, is the case he makes for referential detachment. There are various ways Bhaskar takes on sceptical questions about ontology or or scepticism *per se*, but that is not what this chapter is about. I believe the core of the above idea is that the realist, empirical or not, doesn’t have the luxury of devalidating the skeptic question, or rendering it useless, but has to bite the bullet and confront it using transcendental arguments. The relevance of all this to Kant is that while Bhaskar tries to adopt transcendental realism, Kant defined his stance as “an empirical realist” and “transcendental idealist,” and his work was arguably the most systematic try to overcome problems of philosophy using a transcendental method till his time. I share with the critical realist camp the idea that *transcendental philosophy is not only not restricted to idealism, but is necessary for realism*. My main point here is, there is no idealist embargo on transcendental argumentation. In fact, Bhaskar's transcendental realism provides a critique of empirical realism and transcendental idealism. He argues that Kant couldn’t solve all his difficulties:

The Achilles’ Heel of the First Critique is Kant’s incapacity to sustain the concept of a discursive intellect. Prima facie, he can sustain discursivity (the intransitivity of phenomena) or intellection (the knowability of the intellect), but not both—the only ways he can overcome this dilemma are (i) by conceding that we can after all *know*, rather than merely *think*, the Leibnizian transcendent realm that underpins the Humean empirical manifold, or (ii) by granting that we have direct intellectual encounter, or *Anschauung*, with the mind-in-itself, and a fortiori with the synthetic a priori propositions of critical philosophy. We cannot be banished on *two* sides from intransitive reality.⁷²

This is in fact closely related to Schulze's sceptical criticism of Kant mentioned

⁷¹Roy Bhaskar, *Dialectic: The Pulse of Freedom* (London: Routledge 2008), 188-189.

⁷²Roy Bhaskar, *Dialectic: The Pulse of Freedom*, (London: Routledge 2008), p.300.

briefly above. By Bhaskar's reference to “discursivity (intransitivity of phenomena)” we should simply understand that Kant openly admits the “reality” of phenomena - objects of our knowledge- in the classical philosophical sense of the word (that they are existentially independent of human beings and are not mere conspiracies of our intellects etc.), hence he self-dubs his stance as “empirical *realism*.” Discursivity here is enunciated in the context of referential detachment: Discourse has to be about something other than itself, which logically presupposes an “intransitive” dimension (Bhaskarian term for objective, real, existentially independent.) And the talk of “intellection (the knowability of the intellect)” brings us to Schulze's question: How could it be that we come to know the innate structures of our intellect (the categories of understanding, the pure forms of intuition) which are located in noumena by Kant? Yes, Bhaskar says, Kant adheres to the idea of an objective reality, and that we can know about how our minds work, but if we cannot really “know” what an object of our scientific inquiries is like in itself, and if the structures of our minds are, as Kant situates them, an “objective reality” (not phenomena but noumena), if we insist on staying in Kantian waters, how can we overcome that epistemic barrier that Kant constructed for himself? That is the question put forth by Schulze and reiterated, I think, here by Bhaskar. But what were the problems that Kant himself was presented at the time, and what did he want to accomplish? Let's take a glance at some facets of the problematic of Kant.

3. From Locke and Hume

Starting with the latter question, let me give a brief account of the reasons for the erstwhile uniqueness and originality of Kant's work. The Kantian problematic might

be summarized as explaining the innate structure of the human mind that allows us to have knowledge about things. This problematic itself marks his place in the field of philosophy with regard to empiricists like Locke, as

[Locke] cannot persuasively reconcile how a blank-slate mind can critically construct progressive knowledge from a given experience. Passivity thus gives way to structuring in terms of an implicit interaction that undermines his rejection of innate knowledge. This leads to inferences about the structure of the mind and to what was to become the Kantian problematic.⁷³

To be able to construct an epistemology in which our knowledge has real objects in the empirical world, and is, at the same time, formed and grounded by inherent structures of the human mind though, he would need to take a defensive stance against Humean skepticism, according to which there's no reason whatsoever for us to believe causal relations that we attribute to empirical objects to be in fact real and objective as natural laws, it is just their perceived regularity that leads us to artificially construct such necessary connections by mere habits of mind.

Of course this summary of Kant's problematic is not claiming to be exclusive nor final, as Kant might be read as a philosophy of Newtonian physics ("every alteration must have a cause")⁷⁴ that is in line with an ethic which aspires to avoid entirely closing doors upon the idea of God, or as, an attempt to lay foundations for both causal determination and freedom against Spinoza's "pessimistic" "mechanism", which Kant believes to leave no ground for ethics or even for a

⁷³Jamie Morgan, "Empiricism," in *Dictionary of Critical Realism*, ed. Mervyn Hartwig (London: Routledge 2007), p. 170

⁷⁴Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason* (Cambridge University Press 1998), B5, 138.

“meaningful” understanding of the world.⁷⁵ While seeing some potential that with theoretical work these problematics might be merged, or to put it a little more confidently, demonstrated to be a single one, the one between Locke and Hume mentioned above, I will leave it at that and not try to dig into such discussion about Kant’s exact location(s) in the field of metaphysics. Let’s suffice it to say that Kant’s “critical philosophy” will be limited to his *Critique of Pure Reason* in the narrow scope of this section, and share Kant’s own account of his enterprise:

The famous Locke, from neglect of this consideration, and because he encountered pure concepts of the understanding in experience, also derived them from this experience, and thus proceeded so inconsistently that he thereby dared to make attempts at cognitions that go far beyond the boundary of all experience. David Hume recognized that in order to be able to do the latter it is necessary that these concepts would have to have their origin a priori. But since he could not explain at all how it is possible for the understanding to think of concepts that in themselves are not combined in the understanding as still necessarily combined in the object, and it never occurred to him that perhaps the understanding itself, by means of these concepts, could be the originator of the experience in which its objects are encountered, he thus, driven by necessity, derived them from experience (namely from a subjective necessity arisen from frequent association in experience, which is subsequently falsely held to be objective, i.e., custom);e however he subsequently proceeded quite consistently in declaring it to be impossible to go beyond the boundary of experience with these concepts and the principles that they occasion.⁷⁶

Kant hereby explains that, Locke, while realizing that there *is* a subjective component in our experience with his conception of primary and secondary qualities,

⁷⁵ Cemal Bali Akal, *Varolma Direnci ve Özerklik* (Ankara: Dost Kitabevi 2004), p. 76

⁷⁶Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, Transition to the Transcendental Deduction to the Categories (Cambridge University Press 1998), 225-226.

admittedly fails to grasp what holds them together⁷⁷, coming up with an unknown “substratum” that constitutes their unity. More importantly, he sought this unity in the object, and naturally couldn’t deduce from experience that which went beyond it. Hume on the other hand, realized that the mind played a role on “causalities,” etc. but thought it was just in the sense that it reflected on what the experience provides it with, and that it then tried to install them to the object unjustifiably. Thus, he rejected the “beyond” altogether. The innovation of Kant was that our mind not only thinks upon the experience a posteriori, but constitutes it in “real time” with its a priori forms and categories.

4. Meanwhile in Critical Realism

Now within this context, there’s a trap that awaits us in identifying critical realism’s transcendental argumentation with that of Kant’s, and their ways of dealing with skeptical questions. Callinicos locates and sidesteps it, but blames the trap on Roy Bhaskar. Basically, he explains how Kant’s premises for his transcendental deduction, which started from sense experience, were at least undisputable in his own terms, but that Roy Bhaskar’s wasn’t:

- The reason why [Kant] believes he can accomplish this [see the problematic outlined above] is that he starts with something indubitable: with the kind of sense experience that every human being has; there’s a sense, therefore, in which we start where Descartes pursues the argument of the cogito—with the sense certainty of the individual subject. But Kant does something different from Descartes. He asks, what are the conditions of possibility of such sense experience? What would have to be the case for us

⁷⁷Remember Locke's famous “something, I know not what” definition of substance. E. J. Lowe, *Routledge Philosophy Guidebook to Locke on Human Understanding*, (London: Routledge 1995),

to have the sense experiences that any human subject does?⁷⁸

- ...the point is that it is the model transcendental argument Roy has employed, and critical to it is this indubitable starting point. It's the indubitability of the starting point that transfers certainty, from the premisses to the conclusion. But if we look at Roy's version of the argument in *A Realist Theory of Science*, we don't start from anything indubitable. We start from a particular interpretation of science, which critically involves the distinction between open and closed systems.⁷⁹

(We will come the terms open and closed systems shortly.) Callinicos is both right and wrong. He is right in that Bhaskar's premises are not of an indubitable character at all and are different from Kant's, but he is wrong in assuming that the former was a failure of Bhaskar's and the latter was in his distinction between open and closed systems. Bhaskar, on his turn says:

...That's not the case. ... What I do in the case of *A Realist Theory of Science* is start from two premisses, experimental activity and applied activity. Why? It's not that no one can dispute them, it's because these are premisses which positivism, empiricism and the theories of Kuhn, Popper, Feyerabend and others which infused the philosophical thought of the time all in fact explicitly or implicitly presupposed; that is, did not dispute (or even sometimes theorize). In fact, there's nothing you can take for granted in philosophy except your opponents' premisses.⁸⁰

Indeed, he writes on *A Realist Theory of Science* that "On the conception of philosophy at work in this book both the ultimate premisses and the immediate conclusions of philosophical considerations are contingent facts, the former (but not the latter) being necessarily social and so historical"⁸¹ and distinguishes his starting

⁷⁸Alex Callinicos [with Roy Bhaskar], "Marxism and Critical Realism: A Debate" *Journal of Critical Realism* 1.2 (2003): 89.

⁷⁹Ibid. p.93.

⁸⁰Ibid. p. 94.

⁸¹Roy Bhaskar, *A Realist Theory of Science* (London: Routledge, 2008), 251.

points most clearly in his interview with Mervyn Hartwig:

“What [transcendental realism] asks is what must the world be like for the scientific practice – experimental activity – that our tradition takes as paradigmatic to be possible, intelligible, successful and ongoing. ...and if you do not think science is important you need not to be bound by [the critiques of transcendental realism towards empiricist and idealist accounts of science].”⁸²

From here, Bhaskar goes on to argue that one who dismisses science would have to have a theory of knowledge one way or another if she wants to be taken seriously (even about her position that does *not* take science seriously). This also takes us back to the intrinsically polemical character of philosophy, also problematized in the second chapter in the case of Fleetwood: Philosophy has to be polemical or it will risk being a-historical itself or restrictively tied to some a-historical entity. Bhaskar simply has chosen the polemical road. It is now becoming apparent that Roberts has regarded the critical realist method of argument for what it is specifically not. Transcendental argument in Bhaskar’s works “is always immanent critique,”⁸³ not a deep meditation of Avatar Aang to “transcend” into the Spirit World.⁸⁴

Furthermore, that is not the case for Kant’s works either. He differentiates “transcendental” with “transcendent” as well. Unfortunately when referring to Kant’s original texts, one cannot help but bring forward lengthy quotes because of the stubbornly never-ending nature of his sentences and paragraphs:

⁸²Roy Bhaskar with Mervyn Hartwig, *“The Formation of Critical Realism,”* (London: Routledge 2010), 58.

⁸³Alex Callinicos [with Roy Bhaskar], “Marxism and Critical Realism: A Debate” *Journal of Critical Realism* 1.2 (2003): 97.

⁸⁴For a fuller take on Callinicos’s critique of Bhaskar in the referenced discussion and other works, see Alan Norrie, *Dialectic and Difference: Dialectical critical realism and the grounds of justice* (London: Routledge 2010), 40-42.

We will call the principles whose application stays wholly and completely within the limits of possible experience immanent, but those that would fly beyond these boundaries transcendent principles. But by the latter I do not understand the transcendental use or misuse of categories, which is a mere mistake of the faculty of judgment when it is not properly checked by criticism, and thus does not attend enough to the boundaries of the territory in which alone the pure understanding is allowed its play; rather, I mean principles that actually incite us to tear down all those boundary posts and to lay claim to a wholly new territory that recognizes no demarcations anywhere. Hence transcendental and transcendent are not the same.⁸⁵

So two tendencies of conflation in Roberts's negative assessment of critical realism's Kantian legacy manifest themselves: (1) between the transcendental argumentations of Bhaskar and Kant, (2) and the notions of "transcendent" and "transcendental" in their works (which are different in their differences in each philosopher as well). Here's another fitting example of this:

"In a manner reminiscent of Kant, it is believed that only thought at some distance from the distorting influence of appearances can explore reality. In this way a type of dualism is theoretically reimposed whereby reality is taken to be hidden behind appearances. Thought can grasp the nature of this reality, but it can only do so through the rational subject. Those causal powers eventually retroduced do not therefore share an internal relationship to the real world through either appearances or experience (Sayers 1985: 29-31)."⁸⁶

Let me start with a relatively insignificant qualification. While what Roberts refers to with the obscurity of a term like "the rational subject" is obviously not the extrospectively inquisitive yet idle Lockean spectator of the dawning sun and the bright colors of mountain flowers, it is not some introspectively, solipsistically,

⁸⁵Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason* (Cambridge University Press 1998), 385-386.

⁸⁶Andrew Brown, Steve Fleetwood and John Michael Roberts, "The Marriage of Critical Realism and Marxism: Happy, Unhappy or on the Rocks?" in Andrew Brown, Steve Fleetwood and John Michael Roberts, (eds.), *Critical Realism and Marxism* (London and New York: Routledge 2012), 12-13.

reflexively contemplating lonesome Cartesian rational subject either. More importantly though, it is *not* the Kantian subject who tries to *short-circuit* laws from her *experience* (where she herself had placed causality to begin with) to reach synthetic *a priori* judgments. A reverse-engineering of Roberts's translation could yield us that it is specifically "the notion of scientific activity or labour as work; and [it should be already evident] that the complement of the anthropocentricity in any Humean-based analysis of laws (or nature generally), and necessary for it, is neglect of the *self-conscious human transformative activity or praxis* required for our knowledge of them."⁸⁷ (emphasis added). So this much could be clarified no problem. But what to make of Roberts's last sentence? What does it even mean for something, *anything*, to have (share?) "an internal relationship to the real world"? It is connected to the conflation listed above, but first, let's look at Roberts's reference, that is, Sean Sayers's take on Bhaskar in his *Reality and Reason*:

"Bhaskar, for example, talks of structures and mechanisms as 'transcendent' and as 'transfactual' entities, and repeatedly emphasizes their independence from the empirical world, the world of experience."⁸⁸

This is a very factual and bold (hence the quotation marks) claim and I will meet it as such: *Never once* has Bhaskar talked of structures and mechanisms as "transcendent." Throughout *Reality and Reason*, Sayers only cites *A Realist Theory of Science* and in the section cited by Roberts and myself, entitled "Structuralist Realism," he explicitly mentions that he "shall refer to refer to Bhaskar, *A Realist Theory of Science*." (RTS from now on) The word transcendence is non-existent and

⁸⁷Roy Bhaskar, *Scientific Realism and Human Emancipation* (Routledge 2009), 49.

⁸⁸Sean Sayers, *Reality and Reason: Dialectic and the Theory of Knowledge* (Basil Blackwell 1985), 29-30.

the word “transcendent” appears only once in RTS, and it is in a very different context, regarding the epistemic fallacy which “consist[s] in the view that statements about being can be reduced to analysed in terms of statements about knowledge” and is “manifest in the prohibition of any transcendent entities.” It requires a less than accurate understanding of the philosophy of transcendental realism to represent this entity as referring to structures or mechanisms. Combining Sayers’s misrepresentation with Roberts’s, they can be shown to rest on a mistaken topology in Bhaskar’s ontology. But what is, Bhaskar’s ontology like? I will consult a blog post of a “A Jesuit priest by vocation, an educator by profession, a struggling scholar by accident,” very aptly titled the “beautiful messy world of Bhaskar” to portray it:

Bhaskar posits a stratified reality, with three levels, where what we experience (sense perceptions etc.) are but the surface level. Beyond them, not necessarily experienced but no less real, are events. And underlying them are what he calls mechanisms, or structures—which are indeed the proper object of science. Based on this stratification, Roy suggests three domains of reality: the domain of the empirical (what we perceive and experience), the domain of the actual (events that occur whether or not we perceive them), and the domain of the real (causal mechanisms and structures that are real even if they are not actualized or experienced).⁸⁹

Roberts and Sayers seem to assume the domain of the real (D_r), the actual (D_a) and the empirical (D_e) are non-transitively divided, sitting on horizontally or vertically adjacent continents. Only if it were $D_r//D_a//D_e$, where “//” signifies an intransitive border, could we make sense of something “sharing an internal relationship to the

⁸⁹Johnny Go’s blog, *The beautiful messy world of Bhaskar*, April 29 2012, <http://www.jcgoj.com/?p=2744>. Priest Go’s post provides an excellent few-pages-length outline of the whole of basic critical realism.

real world” (or not), and of structures and mechanisms, the real objects as of science, as transcendent. However, the case in Bhaskar is only that $D_r \geq D_a \geq D_e$. Bhaskar’s useful illustration makes this clear⁹⁰:

	<i>Domain of Real</i>	<i>Domain of Actual</i>	<i>Domain of Empirical</i>
<i>Mechanisms</i>	✓		
<i>Events</i>	✓	✓	
<i>Experiences</i>	✓	✓	✓

Experiences and events are *just as real* as mechanisms. It’s just that they are distinguished from each other, and open systems very rarely yield constant conjunctions of events or empirical patterns or regularities from where the Humean, Lockean and Kantian alike could reach a law of necessity or causal relation, because ontology is *differentiated* and *stratified* and there are a vast multiplicity of different mechanisms and structures operating simultaneously. We have that term “open systems” again. This refers to the “beautiful messy world” of Bhaskar, and is opposed to the “closed systems” of experiments where the causal mechanisms that are investigated are isolated from a myriad of complex relations of them. Outside the laboratory, these structures and mechanisms are not isolated and work together. In a specially and purposefully constructed controlled environment, two different masses dropped at the same time do fall down with the same acceleration, but extremely rarely so in nature because of an infinite number of factors, one the chief ones being different air resistances working on different surfaces. Indeed, our world is messy:

“We are living in open systems which contain a multiplicity of structures and agents, we are living in a mish-mash world. This is precisely why scientists need experimental closures, why they need to absent themselves from the topsy turvy nature of all

⁹⁰Roy Bhaskar, *A Realist Theory of Science* (London: Routledge, 2008), 2.

ordinary life and go into the laboratory and set up an artificially controlled experiment. The differentiation of reality is just as dialectically necessary a part of the thematics of critical realism as a stratification of reality, they go hand in hand.”⁹¹

As Bhaskar says, the differentiation and stratification of ontology is precisely why we make experiments, and that is why “*natural necessities*” and *laws* must be analyzed as *tendencies*. The objects of science, if science is to have any relevance outside the conditions of the laboratory, are therefore not events but those generative mechanisms, structures and powers.

The *transfactuality* mentioned in the quote from Sayers refers to the distinction between the above listed three domains. It can be simplified by an example: Sean Sayers’s book tends to accelerate towards the center of the world, but it does not accelerate (yield an *event*) when I hold it in my hands. An example within the sociosphere could be that there's an inherent tendency of the rate of profit to fall in the capitalist mode of production, but since now, capitalism has found ways to prolong itself very effectively and get out of international crises by reaching new markets, obtaining cheaper labour-power (through wars if necessary) and by technological breakthroughs like computers and the internet etc. But the tendency is always there and working. Andrew Collier gives the example of “oaks, [which] tend to grow tall, but not in Beddgelert Forest because of the wet soil; yet their tendency to grow tall is not without effects in Beddgelert Forest - they do get taller than the gorse bushes, and many of them do fall over.”⁹²

⁹¹Roy Bhaskar, *From Science to Emancipation: Alienation and the Actuality of Enlightenment* (London: Routledge 2012), 67.

⁹²Andrew Collier, *Critical Realism: An Introduction to Roy Bhaskar's Philosophy* (London: Verso, 1994), 63

The transfactual efficacy ascribed to the objects of scientific inquiry by critical realism via *non-Kantian* transcendental arguments (starting from not the possibility of sensual experience but the possibility of science) does not correspond to *transcendence* understood in Kantian terms. With this stratification and differentiation of ontology accommodating the transfactual efficacy of mechanisms, structures and powers, critical realism shows that the ontology of empirical realism is limited to the domain of the empirical (or the actual at its best), and the epistemology of transcendental idealism is loyal to the Humean expectation of constant conjunctions of events and empirical regularities in open systems, which were sufficient for Hume and are still necessary for Kant, only this time structured by a priori forms and categories inherent to the human mind.⁹³

To finalize this matter on transcendence, let me leave the last words to Bhaskar:

Two issues have dominated philosophical controversy about

⁹³As previously mentioned, to develop a critical realist critique of Kant's empirical realism and transcendental idealism is not among the objectives of this chapter, and this is one of the primary missions of *A Realist Theory of Science*, but for less than book sized material on this matter, I would like to divert the reader to Ruth Groff, *Critical Realism, Post-positivism and the Possibility of Knowledge* (London: Routledge 2004), chapter 2; Andrew Collier, *Critical Realism: An Introduction to Roy Bhaskar's Philosophy* (London: Verso, 1994), 20-30; and Roy Bhaskar, *Scientific Realism and Human Emancipation* (London: Routledge, 2009), 27-50. Now there are obvious affinities with Kant and Bhaskar in different contexts such as the relation of science and ethics and some the themes of enlightenment (*Sapere aude!*), but these were not brought in by Roberts, so this chapter will choose to remain oblivious to them as well, as they are not relevant for the subject at hand.

laws. These can be unfurled by divaricating:

(i) analyses which seek to preserve an ontological distinction between necessary and accidental sequences (which I shall dub ‘necessitarian’) from those which do not (‘accidentalists’); and

(ii) analyses which regard necessary connections in nature as knowable by science (‘immanent’) and those which do not (‘transcendent’).

An immanent necessitarian analysis of the type commended here will attempt to sustain an ontologically irreducible necessary/accidental distinction as falling within the existing cognitive competence of science. Clearly an immanent necessitarian need not hold the distinction fixed, or law-like statements immune from revision, nor that all necessary connections are actually known or even potentially knowable.⁹⁴

In this section, I tried to isolate the conflations and falsely intransitive demarcations in Roberts’s (and Sayers’s) interpretation of the Kantian legacy of critical realism, and remind that the legacy actually consists of a critique of empirical realism and transcendental idealism. In the next chapter, I will move on to Roberts’s suggestion (together with many other Marxists) that Hegel is (and should be) the main philosophical legacy of Marxism, and analyze if a materialist inversion of Hegelian dialectic is possible.

V. HEGELIAN DIALECTICS AND THE PROBLEM OF INVERSION

Roberts writes, “The problems here for critical realism can be appreciated in greater depth if we momentarily pause to consider the main philosophical legacy of

⁹⁴Roy Bhaskar, *Scientific Realism and Human Emancipation* (Routledge 2009), 38.

Marxism. Here the leading thinker is, of course, Hegel⁹⁵ and he is definitely not alone in suggesting a reversion to Hegel. We could remember that Fleetwood had relieved us in that “critical realism is [not] replacing dialectical materialism, it is simply doing something else, it is adding to it.”⁹⁶ And combining this with Sean Creaven’s repeated assertion that dialectical materialism provides a materialist inversion of Hegelian dialectics (a metaphor enunciated by Marx, too), in “address[ing] the vexed question of the relationship between the Hegelian and Marxian dialectic, showing how Marx 'inverts ' Hegel, and why this 'inversion' is necessary,”⁹⁷ we have every reason to look firstly into the possibilities of such an operation.

1. Thought Determines Matter

When Louis Althusser opened his “*Contradiction and Overdetermination: Notes for an Investigation*,” with Marx’s well known reference to Hegel on “inverting” his dialectics and “discovering the rational kernel within the mystical shell” in the afterword to the second edition, and quickly went on to raise a hearty complaint of Marx’s remark “rais[ing] as many questions as it answers,”⁹⁸ it was partly because Hegel’s idealism goes way beyond what the internationally wide and overly simplistic booklets of materialism described as “thought determines matter.” Marx never had such a crude definition of idealism nor Hegelianism, and he never had a chance to explain his deep understanding of Hegel in as much detail as he

⁹⁵ Andrew Brown, Steve Fleetwood and John Michael Roberts, “The Marriage of Critical Realism and Marxism: Happy, Unhappy or on the Rocks?” in Andrew Brown, Steve Fleetwood and John Michael Roberts, (eds.), *Critical Realism and Marxism* (London and New York: Routledge 2012), 14.

⁹⁶Ibid. 4.

⁹⁷Sean Creaven, “Materialism, realism and dialectics,” Ibid, p. 131.

⁹⁸Louis Althusser, *For Marx* (Penguin Press, 1969), 90.

wished to, but this didn't prevent the few mentions of his dialectical method in *Capital* from being used as arguments to various interpretations of Hegelianism by other components of Marxist or materialist philosophy that sometimes oversimplified matters.

If we follow Althusser's depiction of the history of philosophy as an everlasting struggle between materialism and idealism in *Lenin and Philosophy*, idealism has a significant head start: It is easier for idealism to "exploit" materialism, than vice versa. When idealism, for instance, empiricism or positivism, exploited materialism in various forms of "dialectical materialism" such as Lenin's *Materialism and Empirio-criticism* and Engels' *Anti-Duhring*, it is very much able to stay as idealism, however it's a lot more difficult to suggest the same for materialism. In fact, an interesting portrait appears: When materialism has tried to exploit idealism, what happened was actually the exploitation of itself by idealism.

Successful attempts on calling "idealisms for help," to my knowledge, are not too many. Examples such as Roy Bhaskar–Kant (among many others), Marx–Aristotle (and obviously Hegel), Louis Althusser–Spinoza, and to some extent, Alexandre Koyre–Plato come to mind. Among the contributions of the last two, I think the most important ones were related to the point I'm trying to make: with Althusser, it was showing that a Hegelian dialectics with a materialist attempt at a formal "inversion" would still remain idealist, and with Koyre, it was showing that Galileo's scientific discovery was more in line with Plato than Aristotle, even with the latter's empiricist imminence as opposed to the former's transcendence, which were wrongly assumed as more materialistic and more idealistic philosophies respectively by again, booklet-materialisms. Many Marxists thinkers were too hasty

in dismissing idealist philosophers. And some, like György Lukacs or Henri Lefebvre, were a little less than vigilant in their call for help. In this section, I will try to explore the irreducibility of Hegel's idealism to "thought determines matter."

2. Object/Subject Dichotomy

In the *Phenomenology of Spirit*, Hegel, in his full opacity, walks the reader, a single, non-dialecticised consciousness at the start, through a dialectical journey, getting farther and farther away from herself, carrying herself along as she goes, moving within herself, at last arriving a teleological end where she now becomes self-consciousness of not only herself but Reason, which was herself all from the start.

There can be no such thing as "thought determining matter," because for Hegel, the very assumption that thought and matter or are distinct realities, actualities, entities, or anything of the sort, is simply nothing else but a passing moment in the journey mentioned above, or to put it more technically, the dialectical process of spirit. The same applies to any dichotomies problematicised by materialist objections to idealisms, such as subject and object, subject and reality, subject and the world, thought and being:

Up till now it [self-consciousness that is "now" Reason, O.Ö.] has been concerned only with its independence and freedom, concerned to save and maintain itself for itself at the expense of the world, or of its own actuality, both of which appeared to it as the negative of its essence. But as Reason, assured of itself, it is at peace with them, and can endure them; for it is certain that it is itself reality, or that everything actual is none other than itself; its thinking is itself directly actual.⁹⁹

The Cartesian subject imprisoned with his lonely skepticism, hurting with suspicions

⁹⁹Hegel, *Phenomenology of Spirit*, Translated by A. V. Miller, Oxford University Press 1977, p. 139

about the truth of the world that he had assumed as external to her, can now rest in peace. She now finds out, at the moment where consciousness has become self-conscious reason, that she had “expended” the world to reach an evidence of her very own existence for nothing. While looking for an essence beyond doubt, it was herself that she discarded. She can now embrace the “demonic” outer world, the categorically distinct “object,” that is herself. There’s no doubt that Hegel, throughout his philosophy, tried to deal with the problems Descartes and Kant (among many others) tried to cope with. Their solutions were at a price Hegel thought wasn’t necessary. Let’s get into a little more detail about Kant.

3. Phenomena / Noumena Dichotomy

Hegel, like Kant, criticizes the Lockean/Humean empiricism which presupposes a pool of external objects that are perceived by the subject. Kant’s major interference, bringing the utilizing and constituting aspect of subject, remedied this in part, but not completely. Jolyon Agar, a critical realist, states that,

“Hegel would concur with Kant’s criticism of the empiricists that the structure of the subject matter of our experiences lies within the structures of the human mind and that to posit them as self-subsistent properties of the objects themselves is an erroneous act of externalizing the mind from itself.”¹⁰⁰

But Hegel wouldn’t accept to pay the price Kant compromised: An unknowable realm, namely noumena. For Hegel, this too, involves an alienation of Reason from itself in its earlier stages of dialectical development by deploying a “mine” that is yet too abstract, and is to reach a more concrete feature:

¹⁰⁰Jolyon Agar, *Rethinking Marxism: From Kant and Hegel to Marx and Engels*, (Routledge 2006), p. 118.

Since Reason is all reality in the sense of the abstract 'mine', and the 'other' is for it something indifferent and extraneous, what is here made explicit is that kind of knowing of an 'other' by Reason, which we met with in the form of 'meaning', 'perceiving' and the 'Understanding', which apprehends what is 'meant' and what is 'perceived'. Such a knowing is at the same time pronounced by the very principle of this idealism not to be a true knowing, for only in the unity of apperception lies the truth of knowing. ... in this way, it [the pure Reason of the idealism] condemns itself of its own knowledge and volition to being an untrue kind of knowing, and cannot get away from 'meaning' and 'perceiving', which for it have no truth.¹⁰¹

While Kant argued that a priori structures situated at the subject was responsible for providing the unity of the object of its knowledge, which otherwise lacks qualities that make it even perceivable like extension and temporality, Hegel believed this unity, together with all other “rational aspects” were an intrinsic feature of all being. Therefore, while for Kant, experience is only possible because of the forms of the human mind, for Hegel, we owe it to the inherent rationality of being altogether.¹⁰² The Kantian distinction between phenomena and noumena is thus dissolved, and what was once “a world of independent sensible properties” for Kant, now turns into a “world of intrinsic and primary unity and so irreducible” by Hegel.¹⁰³ From now on, what used to be a relation between the subject and the object becomes a relation of Reason with itself:

Previously, its perception and experience of various aspects of the Thing were something that only happened to consciousness; but here, consciousness makes its own observations and experiments. ‘Meaning’ and ‘perceiving’, which previously were superseded for us, are now superseded by and for consciousness

¹⁰¹Hegel, *Phenomenology of Spirit*, Translated by A. V. Miller, Oxford University Press 1977, p. 144 .

¹⁰²David West, *Kita Avrupası Felsefesine Giriş*, (İstanbul: Paradigma 2005), p. 43 and p. 67.

¹⁰³Jolyon Agar, *Rethinking Marxism: From Kant and Hegel to Marx and Engels*, (Routledge 2006), p. 124.

itself. Reason sets to work to know the truth, to find in the form of a Notion that which, for ‘meaning’ and ‘perceiving’, is a Thing; i.e. it seeks to possess in thinghood the consciousness only of itself. Reason now has, therefore, a universal interest in the world, because it is certain of its presence in the world, or that the world present to it is rational. It seeks its ‘other’, knowing that therein it possesses nothing but itself: it seeks only its own infinitude.¹⁰⁴

With the “Thing”’s “thinghood” and the observing and experimenting consciousness sublated into an identity of Reason with itself, Hegel doesn’t allow us to formulate a linear and one-way relation between “thought determining matter” nor any similar dichotomies from his dialectics. Hegel’s spirit doesn’t invade, deploy, utilize or exploit matter, world or being either. How can we put their relation more accurately, then?

4. Identity of Being and Thought In Thought

Roy Bhaskar describes Hegel’s project as “an idealism, that by fusing the finite in the infinite, would retain no dualistic or non-rational residues, thereby finally realizing and vindicating the primordial Parmenidean postulate of the identity of being and thought in thought, underpinned by a progressivist view of history.”¹⁰⁵ The most relevant part of this reference for this section lies in the term “identity,” as opposed to a linear determining relation, and more crucially, to a “unity” and even “totality.” Even if it *were* not specifically an identity but unity or totality, it should be never forgotten that Hegel’s system wasn’t only a practical application of such dialectics to a confined, limited realm, but it was itself Geist, Non-Being as well as

¹⁰⁴Hegel, *Phenomenology of Spirit*, Translated by A. V. Miller, Oxford University Press 1977, p. 146

¹⁰⁵Roy Bhaskar, *Dialectic: The Pulse of Freedom*, (London: Routledge 2008), p.17

Being in all its *infinite* implications.

Although we could perhaps outline a certain ethics in Marx's *Capital* indicating an extension of its context into Greek antiquity, demonstrating interesting parallels of his conception of concrete labour as an eternal condition of life and the Aristotelian understanding of life as activity, even the most flexible definition of materialism and realism wouldn't allow us to interpret Marxism as a totality powerful and broad enough to embrace one of Hegelian proportions. I think this is one of the points where Althusser's refreshing "intervention" gains vital significance.

Roy Bhaskar, in his impressively comprehensive and detailed "Dialectic" entry to "*A Dictionary of Marxist Thought*," writes that:

The kernel metaphor seems to indicate that Marx thought it possible to extract part of the Hegelian dialectic – against both (i) the Young Hegelian and Engelsian view that a complete extraction of the dialectical method from Hegel's system is possible and (ii) the view of positivistically-minded critics from Bernstein to Colletti that no extraction at all is possible, that the Hegelian dialectic is totally compromised by Hegel's idealism.¹⁰⁶

If it is, in fact possible, to what extent, and "which way" down? It seems there's no linear two dimensional form in the relation Hegel constitutes between being and thought that could be subject to an inversion. If we insist on assuming a convenient geometrical shape, a direct inversion of this relation would leave us with nothing but simply the identity of the same pair. Even if we force things and reformulate it as "the identity of being and thought in *being*," Althusser will argue that this still wouldn't provide a materialist dialectic (this time, an eloquent "inversion" of "dialectical materialism"), because, in order to overcome the

¹⁰⁶Roy Bhaskar, "Dialectic," in *A Dictionary of Marxist Thought*, ed. Tom Bottomore et al. (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing 2001), 145.

“simplicity” he identifies in Hegel:

This presupposition has not been 'inverted', it has been eliminated; totally eliminated (absolutely! and not in the sense of the *Aufhebung* that 'preserves' what it eliminates) Marxism establishes in principle the recognition of the givenness of the complex structure of any concrete 'object', ...There is no longer any original essence, only an ever-pre-givenness. ...There is no longer any original simple unity (in any form whatsoever), but instead, *the ever-pregiveness of a structured complex unity*.¹⁰⁷

Although I believe it may not be the most precise term, the “simplicity” Althusser states comes mainly from the structure of Hegel’s dialectic that constitutes all its dialectical contradictions as manifestations of a main and single one in a teleological process: the dialectic of Reason. When combined with the perspective of a totalized Marxism, Althusser believes this conceals the rich potentials the different, interrelating and uneven contradictions in varying degrees of dominance belonging to “really” different processes that come together in a specific conjecture may create.

However, as innovative a theoretician Althusser is, it would be very naïve to expect Hegel to show any mercy. Against this, he would claim that wherever Althusser sees a conjecture of complex elements and their relations, allowing *overdeterminations* of social events (for instance, an analysis of an event as complicated and monumental as a revolution as *not* the simple auto-genetic work of a singular contradiction but the non-predetermined outcome of an objective knot of diverse circumstances) he would be seeing a non-yet dialectically developed identity in its non-identical form, on his way to complete itself:

Teleological processes may seem to be provoked by indifferent, external circumstances, which therefore seem to have explanatory priority. In reality, however, the circumstances make no difference to the outcome, of which the true ground is the End

¹⁰⁷Louis Althusser, *For Marx* (Penguin Press, 1969), 198-199.

itself. This End feels itself in the final satisfaction.

The relation of the teleological organism to external circumstance is analogous to the relation of self-consciousness to external reality. As the hungry animal assimilates its food, so self-consciousness understands external objectivity, and makes it its own. But since it first does so instinctively, its satisfaction seems doubled: it is felt by itself, but is also referred to a sort of blind understanding in the object.

An organism conceals the relation of its manifest actions to their immanent aim, and so seems to have been constructed by an outside intelligence. Just so Reason conceals the inner necessity of its own proceedings, and locates it in the objects that it is studying. In both cases there is a distinction which is really no distinction: teleology is in the organism, and Reason in the thing studied.¹⁰⁸

Having only a glimpse into the arduous texts of Hegel, it's not difficult to sympathize with the attempts to simplify his theory, but in this section, I tried to show that the complicated character of Hegel's system doesn't only belong to the stylistic aspects of his work, but also belongs to its content, as much that any reductionist try for a simplification may already be defined as a moment in his dialectic.

5. What Dialecticised Critical Realist Ethics Can Bring

In this concluding section, I will preliminarily sketch what dialectical critical realism can bring to Marxism in specific and a broader notion of emancipatory political projects with its unique axiology of freedom, and how this could make room for promising further research.

With the dialecticisation of critical realism, the ethical dimension already apparent in scientific realism is set free to expand to much broader contexts, but most

¹⁰⁸Hegel, *Phenomenology of Spirit*, Translated by A. V. Miller, Oxford University Press 1977, p. 531

significantly, it can bring back the spirit of the “Greeks,” tie it to Marx and from there, reach an even more general category of emancipatory practice.

It could be argued that the relationship between Marx and the two Greek philosophers, Plato and Aristotle, does not solely consist in a battle scene of a historical struggle between idealism and materialism but resides in a shared ethical context. While caution is of the essence not to seem to combine Plato and Aristotle’s thoughts in a huge melting pot, a superficial discourse analysis is sufficient to show that they shared a powerful critical attitude against sophists, and that sophists were not just masters of random and solely formal rhetoric lacking in tangible philosophical content, but shared a common utilitarianism and conventionalism, hinting at a humanism in the sense of theoretical anthropocentrism. The latter is especially explicitly discerned in the Platonic dialogue *Theaetetus*, where two philosophical approaches to knowledge (“Knowledge is perception” put forth by the young Theaetetus himself and “Man is measure of all things” belonging to Protagoras) converge and fall through a Socratic refutation of empiricism and humanism¹⁰⁹. This analysis was conducted in a similar manner with Althusser's critique of theoretical humanism, where he fittingly cites Marx, whose “analytical method does not start from man,”¹¹⁰ and also with critical realism, in which “the theme of anti-anthropocentricity is the single most distinctive.”¹¹¹ A thick branch of Badiou's arguments against post-modern philosophies of today, may be said to rest

¹⁰⁹ Plato, *Complete Works*, ed. by John M. Cooper (Indianapolis: Hackett, 1997), 157-234.

¹¹⁰ Louis Althusser, *For Marx* (Penguin Press, 1969), 219.

¹¹¹ Roy Bhaskar, ‘Critical realism in resonance with Nordic ecophilosophy’ in Roy Bhaskar, Karl Georg Hoyer and Petter Naess, (eds.), *Ecophilosophy in a World of Crisis: Critical realism and the Nordic contributions* (London and New York: Routledge 2012), 10.

on the extensions of ancient sophists to contemporary thought, as he specifically characterizes Wittgenstein and his successors in linguistic philosophy as modern sophists.¹¹² Adorno and Horkheimer make “instrumental reason,” a very sophistic concept in content, one of the main objects of their critical theory.

Both Aristotle and Plato tried to establish an ethics (as opposed to a conservation of the status quo via a strictly normative and a theoretically humanist morality) that strives for *eudaimonia* and to base ethics as indispensably immanent in human practice, and they made a categorical distinction between survival and life, defining the latter with relation to virtue as human activity. This is a point that is implied by the Greek word *arete* (translated into English as *virtue*), which connotes not just an abstract sense of moral disposition, but turning a potential into action fully and excellently. Marx’s “explanatory critique” (in the sense of the term which builds a solid bridge between knowledge and ethics in Bhaskar's works) of the capitalist mode of production has similar themes of ethics, action and freedom, and his work practically makes the same distinction between life and survival above, against the theorists of social contract (mainly Hobbes, whom Collier, a critical realist, likens to sophists of Platonic dialogues¹¹³).

The Aristotelean colligation of *eudaimonia* with activity where “human good turns out to be activity of soul exhibiting virtue,”¹¹⁴ could be traced through Marx's crucial distinctions between use/exchange value, labour power/labour and

¹¹² Alain Badiou, *Conditions* (London: Continuum, 2008), 20.

¹¹³ Andrew Collier, *In Defence of Objectivity and Other Essays* (London and New York: Routledge, 2003), 149.

¹¹⁴ Aristotle, *The Nicomachean Ethics* (Oxford University Press, 2009), 12.

concrete/abstract labour, to the way he understood “the true realm of freedom” as “the development of human powers as an end in itself.”¹¹⁵ The concept of labour in this context can extend beyond a scientific tool peculiar to an analysis of a certain mode of production, towards “an eternal necessity which ... mediates human life itself.”¹¹⁶ Aristotle’s analysis of “chrematistics” could in turn be construed as the primitive starting point of Smith’s and Marx’s analysis of the capital¹¹⁷, but more relevantly, it’s also possible to read the works of Marx in relation to the dominant ethical opinions of classical antiquity in general.¹¹⁸

Even though it’s relatively not as fully elaborated as other facets of his philosophy, Bhaskar, while philosophically “underlabouring” for Marxian social science, introduces a comprehensive theory of ethics for emancipation in a similar problematic of the two ancient Greeks, by connecting Alethia with ethics (a central theme of Platonic dialogues) and situating ethics firmly in human agency (although not with exactly the same terminology, a legacy from the Aristotelian understanding of action), via the critique of Hume’s law, breaking down the dichotomy between facts/values and is/ought.¹¹⁹ Additionally, being in line with Plato’s moral realism to

¹¹⁵ Karl Marx, *Capital Volume III* (London: Penguin, 1991), 959. In Collier’s reference to the same section, in *Marx: A Beginner’s Guide* (Oxford: Oneworld, 2004), 107, from the 1981 Hammondsworth, Penguin edition of Capital Volume III, the translation is “human energy” instead of “human powers.”

¹¹⁶ Karl Marx, *Capital Volume I* (London: Penguin Classics, 1982), 133.

¹¹⁷ See Spencer J. Pack, *Aristotle, Adam Smith and Karl Marx* (Northampton, MA: Edward Elgar, 2010).

¹¹⁸ See George E. McCarthy (ed.), *Marx and Aristotle: Nineteenth-century German Social Theory and Classical Antiquity* (Rowman & Littlefield, 1992).

¹¹⁹ Roy Bhaskar, *Scientific Realism and Human Emancipation* (London and New York: Routledge, 2009), 169.

a significant extent, Bhaskar's concept of Alethic truth “is by no means restricted to science, but [is] encountered in our everyday lives in every level, since the dawn of geo-history”¹²⁰ and is not only closely linked with “the good” and freedom, but it *is* the good and it *is* freedom.¹²¹ On the other hand, while there are little references to sociality in the way Plato and Aristotle conceptualized *eudaimonia*, with a parallel of the city and the soul in the former and the definition of human beings as *zoon politikon* in the latter, Bhaskar attached inseparable ties between sociality and *eudaimonia*, in taking “the universal flourishing of each [as] a condition of the universal flourishing of all.”¹²² And that, together with *truth*, is the theme borrowed from the Greeks, remembered in Marx, and centralized in the dialecticisation of critical realism, which now allows critical realists to begin “talking about good and evil.”¹²³

¹²⁰ Mervyn Hartwig, *Dictionary of Critical Realism* (London and New York: Routledge, 2007), 28.

¹²¹ Roy Bhaskar, *Dialectic: The Pulse of Freedom* (London and New York: Routledge, 2008), 198.

¹²² Alan Norrie, *Dialectic and Difference* (London and New York: Routledge 2010), 143.

¹²³ See Alan Norrie, “The Scene and the Crime: Can Critical Realists Talk about Good and Evil?” *Journal of Critical Realism* 11.1 (2012)

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