

about God, if we are not at a relativist impasse, we are at an epistemological stalemate. Prima facie, unless there are overriding considerations against us, I think it is epistemically rational for each of us to trust or privilege our own personal experience. Thus, for the time being, it is epistemically rational for those who experience God to believe in God, and equally rational epistemically for those who do not experience God not to believe in God.

### Uncanny guest

That being so, it is illegitimate for sociology to decide *a priori* that Hannah's experience of God is a social construction, entirely to be explained without reference to the putative object of her experience. In any true experience, the object of experience contributes to the content of the experience. To deny that contribution is to commit a ver-

sion of the epistemic fallacy, where we try to explain what we know without consideration of what there is to know. It is also in this case, to collapse the very category of experience. If no object of experience contributes anything to the content of the experience, then what remains is hardly an experience at all.

Of course, for sociology to take seriously the possible object of Hannah's experience, it must finally admit into its own discourse, along with literary theory, a truly uncanny guest. That uncanny guest is theology. When theology is admitted into our discourse, it reaffirms a concern with alethic truth, which, ironically, recovers the Enlightenment project.

### Notes

1. *Landscapes of the Soul*, forthcoming, OUP.



Roy Bhaskar

## Introducing Transcendental Dialectical Critical Realism

*After Doug Porpora's presentation a question was raised, in effect, whether religious sociology, as distinct from the sociology of religion, has a proper place within critical realist discourse. The corrigibility of experience is a central realist tenet, and indispensable to explanatory critique of, say, fascist experience. How can religious experience be corrigible given that there can be no agreement within the scientific community concerning its object (or whether, indeed, it has a real object)? After some discussion, Margaret Archer (in the Chair), suggested that Roy should be allowed to provide the 'hinge' on this issue, because the discussion was cutting off epistemology from ontology, which is not what Doug does in his book, and what Roy wanted to do was swing the focus away from the experiential to the ontological groundings Doug invokes.*

### Realism about transcendence

I would like to relate three of Doug's points in particular to what I am going to say, which isn't a sort of resumé of *From East to West*, but rather an introductory background to it. The three points I would particularly like to take up are first, the question of realism about religious experience, which I would broach under the broader category of realism about *transcendence*. Secondly, I think talk about God is eased in a dialectical critical realist context by being seen as talk about an – or the – *ultimatum*. Thirdly, I want to focus on that dialectic of *co-presence* which is the dialectic of autonomous and heteronomous – or real and unreal – determinations. I will argue that transcendence as such is a phenomenon which has been much misunderstood and is essential to science, and in particular scientific discovery.

So I am not going to argue about specifically theological or religious transcendence as such, but I would like to say a few words about the dispute into which Doug got embroiled. There are two interesting takes I would like to suggest on the *démarche* Doug seemed to get landed in. The first is that, within the continuum of being, is there really such a huge difference between realism about God and realism about any other being – for instance a galaxy which is beyond the expanse of our current most powerful microscopes? Secondly, suppose that God was in fact the self – that God was the missing

self or at least was to be included in it, i.e. that God was part of the missing self – then there might be an interesting new angle on Doug's question.

However, what I primarily want to defend in this talk is realism about transcendence. One form of transcendence is the sort of transcendence typically found – or claimed to be found – in acts of religious worship: meditation, prayer, communion or whatever. So that is one of the things I would like to pick up from Doug's talk. The second thing is really, more specifically, his realism about God and I would like to subsume this under the question of realism about *ultimata*. In *Dialectic* and other works I distinguished various levels of being, and it is clear from what Doug is saying (and I'm bouncing my ideas off Doug's now to make for dialectical continuity this afternoon) that for him and for many Americans God is an *ultimatum*. So I'm going to be talking about realism about transcendence and realism about *ultimata*. *Ultimata* have particular qualities and one of their qualities that is relevant to our discussion is that they are in some way *ingredient* in lower orders of being, so that if God did exist and if God was an *ultimatum* one would expect God, as a basic property of the universe, a basic constituent or categorial structure, to be for instance in this room – and indeed in some sense in each part or aspect of it (without however saturating the room, so that we should still have to say that there were other things besides God present in the room).

### **Irrealist surface, realist deep structure**

A third interesting idea relating to Doug's book is the peculiar paradox we find in American society between the ontological necessity for Americans to be selves and their absence of a sense of self. For what we have here is the co-existence of a presence, namely reasons, or their belief that there are reasons for everything they do, and an absence, namely their being unable to cite or justify the belief that there are reasons (or that these – such-and-such – are the reasons). It is the same or a parallel contrast between the existence of the self and a lack of a sense of that existence of the self. This is a perfect example of the dialectics of co-presence, and this takes me to the theme of my talk. There is what strikes me as being a huge paradox about realism. Most philosophy and most societies are profoundly irrealist in character. Now I claim realism to be true, and we critical realists believe realism to be true; so we have a juxtaposition between an irrealist categorial structure (and I mean this as part of what I call the platinum plate in Hegelian dialectic, viz. the way in which one can use a philosophy as a diagnostic clue to the character of our society – and I think it is true to say that our societies are in character profoundly irrealist) and our belief that realism is fundamentally true.

Now this pattern or figure of an irrealist surface and a realist deep structure is paralleled by similar motifs which vibrate, recur and resonate throughout western and indeed eastern thought. For example there is the assumption that Marx and Rousseau had that man is essentially free – that at a deep level, he/she/we are *even now* essentially free – but everywhere in chains. Then that essential freedom which we possess is occluded and overlain by structures of what Marx called ideology and what the Vedic tradition in India regards as *maya* or illusion. So the structure of these two forms of thought in respect of freedom and in respect of realism are very similar. We have the idea of an irrealist categorial structure masking and overlaying and acting as a surface filter to a profound deeper realist structure which is waiting (and wanting) to be free of this irrealist superstructure. And the idea of autonomous human beings in some basic sense aspiring to be free, that is to be shed of, or rather to shed themselves the heteronomous structures that impede and prevent the liberation of humanity. This seems to be a fundamental theme, which I touched on in my talk in Örebro, *the* fundamental theme and presupposition of western radical thought – it is amazing how prevalent it is in radical critical and libertarian thought and philosophical writing.

Now besides these paradoxes of irrealism and freedom there are other similar paradoxes. We could say that the universe is necessarily one and whole and seems to be bound together by holistic forces. In the ethical domain one would look to instances of love as a great binding force. And yet the world as we know it is also overlain and occluded by structures which are highly divisive, alienating, split. In the ethical domain the overriding emotion remains one of fear. Our world is dominated by fear, not love. Then again, this is a world, one could

claim – I would certainly claim – of enormous abundance, yet it's also a world of extraordinary poverty. This is a world without (non-dialectical) rationale. For we can have good reason to believe that we can cut oppression and suffering to a minimum; yet it is at the same time a world characterised by massive oppression and suffering.

### **Dialectic of co-presence**

So what seems to be happening is that we have a view of human beings as essentially free – the structure of the world as essentially realist and essentially harmonious, or one in which something like cosmic love could manifest itself – being *occluded* and *overlain* by heteronomous or irrealist categorial structures or determinations. In arguing for categorial realism, I've argued that categories are real so there is nothing wrong in talking about categorial structures as features of the universe: they are in fact the most basic features of the universe.

Now there are two mechanisms operating here: perceptual occlusion and causal determination – the fact is that the fundamental essential freedom or autonomy of human beings is both hidden *and* overlain by structures of oppression, master-slave relationships, reification, duality, alienation, split and the mystified world of ideology in which we all live most of our lives. Thus we have both a perceptual mechanism and a causal mechanism. These are difficult to disentangle except conceptually. For are not all beliefs experientially (and to that extent perceptually) informed, or to the extent that they are to be efficacious, e.g. as manifest in the form of wants, do they not include or depend on a perceptual component? At the same time all causal determinations in the human world are informed by cognitive and thus perceptual claims. So the perceptual (or more generally cognitive) and the causal, or the cognitive and causal, metaphors I've used – the surface structures of society occluding and overlaying the deep structures – fit together very neatly.

And this is the basic structure of a dialectic of co-presence, which is very central to dialectical critical realism and critical realism, crucial to the thought of Marxism and the western radical tradition generally, but which is equally to be found in the eastern Vedic tradition where the world of ordinary, surface everyday life is characterised as a world of duality, alienation, split. The central idea here is that man is essentially Godlike, subsisting and acting in a world of relativity and duality. A difference springs up only as a product of illusion. And it is the essential nature of man to come to see through this illusion and to realise their self-consciousness as free and/or Godlike. We needn't go into the details of this basic structure of thought, but it has the characteristics of a dialectic of co-presence and it is equally central to critical realism and western radical and much eastern, broadly libertarian thought.

### **Liberation and disemergence**

What is the process of liberation then? This must be understood within the context of the development of a disposi-

tional and a categorial realism in which we have the central idea of the multi-tiered stratification of being. Now if the autonomous or the realist level, the potential level, is already in some sense actualised, but overlain and occluded by the heteronomous or irrealist level, then to become fully free, an aspiration which would be reflected in a realist categorial structure of the society, what we have to do is to shed, let go, get rid of the heteronomous levels or orders of determinations, the alienations, constraints and reifications that dominate our contemporary society. And I would argue along the lines of Andrew, but in a different way, that such a society would be based on an ethic of love, unconditional love rather than fear.

Is such a dialectic of liberation anything more than a pipe dream? I think so; for what is a pipe dream is the supposition that this world of heteronomy, of irrealism, can carry on indefinitely, because the stratification of being is such that there are one-way relations of dependency between more basic and more superficial strata. Thus the existence of master-slave relationships is entirely dependent on the creativity of slaves. And when we realise that, we realise that, if slaves cease to be creative, master-slave relationships would be no more. But, conversely, the creativity of slaves, or the creativity of free human beings, can persist without the existence of master-slave relationships. So it's not that we have to hope that an autonomous or realist society will magically manage to spring into existence. It already is in existence. It is the heteronomous and irrealist world which is entirely dependent on it. This is itself a liberating thought, though thoughts are only truly liberating when geared into action. But it does mean that the world of duality, split, alienation, illusion, ideology, fetishism, money, reification can only survive for so long.

Now as to what can happen there are only three possible solutions in terms of logic. One is that the realist, the autonomous, the free, the loving could be entirely suppressed. I am arguing that this is impossible because heteronomy, irrealism, etc. are all parasitic on the truth, on freedom, on love; vice is parasitic on virtue, so that is not a live option. Second, the vicious world could destroy the virtuous world physically and our planet could be destroyed. In that way the vicious world would not sustain itself any further, but the virtuous world would cease to be complete, would not exist, in isolation by itself, as a whole, untainted by heteronomy; and arguments could be adduced to show that this incompleteness would have to be remedied (namely by a new round of a dialectic of embodiment). The third is that we do pursue a dialectic of liberation and disemergence, of shedding. This indeed is the only feasible solution for humanity, the only way we can go.

I would argue we do this through dialectics of action and inaction, and the chief dialectic of action is the dialectic of desire to and for freedom which I set out in *Dialectic: The Pulse of Freedom*. There are other dialectics of action, some of which I articulated there, and others of which I develop in *From East to West*, but I haven't explored dialectics of inaction, except in my recent work, to the same extent. Basically, if you want proof of realism, or

autonomy, of your own freedom and sense of self, what you have to do is *access* it; so you need a dialectic of access, and this ties up with the point Doug was making about religious experience, which is a specific form of a dialectic of inaction. Then you need to *shed* those heteronomous, irrealist, alienated levels and layers of determination. Thirdly, you need to fully *embody* or embed the autonomous real, in all the existing strata and levels of society, so you need something like a dialectic of embodiment. And finally you need a dialectic of *witnessing* or self-consciousness because this has to be subject to rational control and critical scrutiny and done to the level at which humanity's full potential and powers, including powers for further development, flourish, as an embodied, emotional and a rational species.

### Transcendental experiences

Now I said I'd say a little bit, picking up from Doug, about how transcendence and ultimata fit into this.

First transcendence. If we go back to Hegelian dialectic, I have argued that the four central features of Hegelian dialectic are its *rational kernel*, its *mystical shell*, its *golden nugget* and its *platinum plate*. The rational kernel consists essentially in a dialectical learning process which involves transcendence to a greater totality, depending upon the resolution of oppositions, conflicts, contradictions, aporia, and the restoration of lacunae and other incompletenesses, by resort to a greater totality; and of course the greater totality we are concerned with in this human world is the totality of the human race in our natural environment (in what I have called four-planar human being). The mystical shell is ontological monovalence, or the absence of absence. The golden nugget is the dialectics of co-presence, and the platinum plate is the diagnostic value of philosophy. What the mystical shell, the absence of absence, does, is to occlude the central moment in the rational kernel. This is precisely the very moment of transcendence in which we reach for a new, greater, synthesising, transcending concept. It is that moment of human creativity which comes *ex nihilo*, out of the blue, which cannot be sustained by reference to inductive or deductive norms; that moment of transcendence which inspires the scientist and the artist and which people find or claim to find in religious worship that we have to start investigating and taking seriously as well as critically. Every human act, every genuine transformative human act, comes *ex nihilo* from the absence onto a more or less well prepared immanent ground, prepared by prior rounds of transformative work, and consists in the operation of a transcendent cause on that immanent ground. This starts to put religious experience in the same sort of category as transcendental experiences in general, from moments of scientific and artistic inspiration to moments of a more quotidian nature but essential to all human transformative praxis.

Now where does the ultimatum idea come in? Higher order or more basic categories are epistemologically transcendent, but ontologically immanent, and in particular ingredient in lower order or more superficial categories.

And so one would typically expect something like a new idea which was coming from ‘out of the blue’ or from an undiscovered stratum of reality or dimension of being to be coming from a stratum which was both *epistemologically transcendent* and *ontologically immanent*. Now it is important to note that God or the ultimatum, whatever it is, has to be ontologically ingredient in all the lower order strata to some degree and in some respect or other. So this would justify the view, if we were going to talk about God, of the ontological immanence of God in man. This may be thought to raise the questions: does God create man or does man create God, or is man in fact God, or is the true essence of God man rather than the true essence of man God, is that what God is? However if there is an ultimatum, whatever the value of such speculations, this idea of ontological ingredient must not encourage any sort of anthropocentricity. Because if there is an ultimatum it will far outweigh humanity. So we should not become too conceited by the idea that man’s essence may be Godlike. Because man’s essence, if it is Godlike, will itself be part of a totality which is far greater in width and depth than man himself, so this idea gives no cause for a resort to anthropocentricity. God, as an ultimatum, is ingredient in, but neither exhaustive of nor saturated by, man and man’s world; that is to say, God is partially manifest in it, and, as part of him, as it.

I hope these few remarks have justified, a little bit, the legitimacy within a critical realist discourse of making the points Doug was making. I have put them in the context of a more general realism about transcendence and realism about ultimatata, because I want to get away from existing disputes we have about religious experience. There are very many forms of religious experience. Ontological realism about God is consistent with epistemological relativism about our modes of experiencing him and judgmental rationalism about religious beliefs and experiences – not all of which are legitimate and some of which are no doubt heinous. I’m trying to get a debate going by putting Doug’s talk of religious experience and the talk of others with religious experience within the category of transcendental experiences, so that they can then have a place in the scrutiny and the discourse of critical realism. And if we can think of God, breaking free from customary connotations, as the ultimate categorial structure of the universe – which is what I think people who talk about God do in fact think of God as – in fact, then we can get a different perspective on the philosophy of religion: one which makes God immanent in man but gives no grounds for anthropocentric conceit. For, to repeat, God neither exhausts nor is exhausted by man or his world.

### **Powers of liberation and survival**

However, it does give us grounds and support for arguments in favour of liberation. Because, if we have within ourselves, whether we believe it’s God or not, all the powers of the ultimate constitution of the universe, dispositionally real and indeed actualised in ourselves, though occluded and overlain by structures of heteronomy, alien-

ation and irrealism, then there is nothing we cannot achieve. The main thing I think we want to achieve is freedom, and to achieve this all we have to do is to shed the illusions and the ingrained structures which hold us in thrall. But if we can come to the realisation that at the deepest level we are autonomous, that if we are slaves or otherwise creative, we are nevertheless free, a freedom upon which all oppression ultimately depends; if we can realise that we are such beings as a dialectical critical realist and perhaps a transcendental dialectical critical realist describes, then we do have grounds for the belief that ours is the struggle for the survival of humanity. For humanity can’t survive unless we become free. Conversely if we become one with our ultimatum or Godlike essence then we have all the powers of the universe at our disposal, and there is a chance that, if we learn as much from Marx and perhaps the Vedics as we do from contemporary sociology, we may yet win through to a world in which we can live in a stance of unconditional love for ourselves and each other and for every other being (or for that matter non-being) in our environment.

So those were just a few ideas picked up from Doug’s talk, but which I go into in a systematic way in *From East to West*.

**Margaret.** You say that the ultimate human desideratum is freedom. I would question whether freedom is the ultimate desideratum on the grounds that freedom is either a freedom *from* or a freedom *to*, which implies that it is incomplete in itself. You said it would lead to our acting in unconditional love. I would be very tempted to put those two the opposite way round: yes we need to be free to live in an unconditional love but the ultimatum, the ultimate state to which the whole of humanity is groaning and struggling is that creative expression of ultimate fraternity—

**Roy.** What I meant is, what we need *now* is freedom. The ultimatum is not freedom. The desideratum is freedom, the ultimatum is unconditional love. It is interesting that in your very words, when making this point with which we both agree, you talked about creatively expressing unconditional love, so creativity is essential to human being. I do not think that, either for human beings or for a generalised psychology of them, action is such a great problem. I believe that we’ve got to think through all the categorial domains of dialectical critical realism and that this transcendental deepening or radicalisation of dialectical critical realism (which I am calling transcendental dialectical critical realism) will lead us to see that really the best action, and indeed most action, is basic, that is, pretty spontaneous; it is not calculating instrumental action. Moreover, most action is not narrowly self-motivated, although thinking action may often be so self-motivated. Indeed I would say that we are faced with an option in ethics of two ethical stances: one based on spontaneous unconditional love and the other based on instrumental conditional reasoning, and I think particularly that unconditionality in love and in reasoning go hand in hand and that our society suffers from a surfeit of conditionality and

instrumentality superimposed upon basic action, whereas good action is spontaneous and pretty natural. It is the sort of action, if one had to use an analogy, of the sun or a flower. The sun doesn't try and shine, it just shines; a flower doesn't try and grow, it just grows. And human beings left to themselves are lovely, they will find out how to use language, they will love each other, we can organise a society without reified structures (including ultimately I believe money), just give us a chance.

**Question.** I have a problem with the word/concept freedom. Kant defined it almost as one phase— you wouldn't want to define freedom as freedom from causal determination, for example. Part of the causal structure of the world is other people with complex wants, desires and beliefs.

**Roy.** What you say is absolutely true: humanity is essentially one, but each human being is essentially unique, concretely singularised and each is different. I can't see a huge social problem there, we still have to negotiate, we'll still have problems caused by the complexity of whatever wants we have, but we may find our wants moving in an unexpected and more simple and easily satisfiable way, there's no reason why not. If you take the structural wants in our existing society: you have two cars, what's your next want – three, then four, this is absurdity, there is a finite number of cars that any family or any person needs. And so, it is not necessarily true that greater freedom will result in an indefinite perpetuation of wants or social conflict, it could result in greater simplicity, greater harmony, greater love of the elements, greater enjoyment of each other's company.

**Margaret.** There is another side to this which is very compatible indeed with your stress upon creativity, because just the celebration of the unconditionality of love without introducing the wisdom, the prudence, the consideration of the good of the other being, or what Andrew calls in his St Augustine section the loving in due order, is not actually going to resolve any of those problems. But the optimistic thing it seems to me is that just as all these distortions happen on our freedom because of the society in which we live, nevertheless we can see endless exemplifications of the creativity of unconditional love exercised in wisdom and judgement in the ordinary ways in which, for example, a mother interacts with her child, which isn't to say yes to everyone, but it is to exercise a discretion and leading out, and encouragement which is all of those things, or what you mean by the necessary creative moment in the exercise of love.

**Roy.** Yes, and I mean that I think that such a society will be characterised centrally by difference and change, it will not be stagnant.

**Question.** You said that "categorical structures are ... the most basic features of the universe". Was this a slip, an endorsement of some sort of grand idealism, or what?

**Roy.** Transcendental and critical realism has always insisted on categorial realism. Now, what are the categories? They are things like substance, causality, arguably space, time, in the social world, things like housing, education, money and so on. Now for the critical realist, causality is not a schema imposed upon the world as it is for a Kantian; causality exists in the world. It's not just that Ohm's law or causal laws exist in the world, but that causality and lawfulness and causal lawfulness are real features of the world: so categories are really in the world. Now, if God is an ultimatum or a most basic structure then he/she/it would be something like a categorial structure of a very high order, and this was appreciated by Hegel and Spinoza. However by talking about ultimatata I've tried to defuse it from a lot of theological issues and aporiai; nevertheless it remains of paramount importance to stress that categorial realism is an essential part of critical realism.

**Question.** So you didn't mean conceptual structures?

**Roy.** No, I mean a category like causality could exist in a world without concepts at all, the conceptualisation of it is in what I call the transitive dimension. It's true that when you have human beings you have both categories and conceptualisations of them but you get wrong conceptualisations of categories, as the Humean theory of causality is the wrong conceptualisation of the category of causality.

**Question.** Why do we talk about causal structures and also about a category of causal structures, I am not sure about this idea.

**Roy.** The concept of a category is a basic philosophical concept. It is a concept, but it has a reference, it has a referent in the world. There will still be a difference between talking about the reality of causality as distinct from the subjective or objective idealist notions and talking about the reality of a particular nominated causal law. To say that substance is real or that time, space, causality, holism, totalities or the self are real, these are all ultimately categorial claims because they are claims of a very basic significance, and what they denote is that the object of the term, which is called the category, is real. Categorial realism makes it clear that you can be wrong in your basic characterisation of the world. Therefore when you talk about irrealist and realist categorial structures it is important to distinguish between your conceptual categorisation of the world, which is in the transitive dimension and the real categorisation of the world, or the categorisation of the world as it is in itself, which is in the intransitive dimension. Categorial realism is a deep part of ontological realism, which is initiated as the reference of our epistemological attempts to classify the world categorially and sub-categorially.

**Question.** Is God categorially real?

**Roy.** If God were real, he would be categorially real.

**Question.** Is the ultimatum real?

**Roy.** For the purpose of this talk, the ultimate ultimatum is real.

**Question.** And if it is God, he is responsible for everything, for all the bad things as well?

**Roy.** Absolutely: the condition of possibility, that's why I talked about this one way relationship of dependency.

**Question.** The Church's subjects say that God is responsible for everything—

**Roy.** It's not quite as simple as that, because this ultimatum provides the conditions of possibility, but does not determine, what happens at lower order levels. This is the true basis of free will. God, if you like, provides the enabling conditions, man determines, selects, picks out from them, from the totality of possibilities which God affords.

**Question.** God is unconditional love. This is two people loving each other unselfishly?

**Roy.** Perhaps one wants to generalise that even further and talk about the whole room loving itself, and all other people in all other rooms, and ultimately the whole universe, unconditionally.

**Question.** In your book, *Dialectic: the Pulse of Freedom*, the pulse of freedom is something contained within the historical, the social; it's always there, and always reminds you that it's there. The ethical impulses are quite tightly controlled within that book. What you seem to be doing now is severing the relationship between the historical and the ethical. The idea that 'man is born free but everywhere in chains' sets up quite an antinomy between freedom and determination, autonomy and heteronomy, and that seems to be open to the criticism that you are simplifying a relationship between the ethical and historical, political and social in a way that gives one a sense of almost – with one bound we are free—

**Roy.** .... [tape change]. All these institutions, all these structures are largely historical and social; that moment is there and that is the life blood of it all. What's lacking perhaps in *Dialectic* is a clear idea of the actuality of autonomy, the essentiality of creativity, the immediacy of that transcending moment which is the inspiration and driving force of every human act. To say *we are* essentially free, that *we are* free in actuality, although this is occluded and overlain by the structures in which we live, is a profoundly liberating thought, and it will inspire that impulse, that pulse which I described in my book *Dialectic*. The pulse doesn't just come when the slaves revolt, the slaves are in revolt because they realise they are essentially free. It is this realisation that must be built explicitly into the structure of critical realist thought, before it was there only implicitly. .... Critical realists think

they've got the truth, or something close to it, about the categorical structures of society, but everywhere we see the dominance of irrealism, as for instance in postmodernist or positivist thought. Perhaps it's important to assert the reality and actuality of those real and autonomous structures as *there*, even though they're so invisible to us. Perhaps in this moment of time we need to grasp them, realise we're free, and we can do it: humanity can survive; the world is fundamentally realist and human beings are essentially free. But they still have to realise this freedom, they're not only essentially free, they have to become *only* free: they're essentially free but in actuality oppressed, so that they are both free and unfree, or less paradoxically only partially free (because their freedom is overlain by oppression). So this is putting the dialectic within a context which looks antinomic initially, but isn't really because the dialectic, involving the co-presence of freedom and unfreedom is stratified and moving the whole time. In a way it's just making clear that the basis of the drive to freedom rests on the actuality of our essential freedom.

**Question.** Despite your qualification that universal love was only the ultimatum, I've noticed that several times today and in your books you talk about universal love as the immediate necessity, as if it's what we all need to be driving to. Now, it strikes me that this was Feuerbach's philosophy, Feuerbach was a humanist who wanted to liberate people's potential, but as Marx pointed out he wasn't able to do that because he wasn't able to identify the right questions and wasn't able to draw the class divide correctly and wasn't able to analyse the structures of capitalist society. I'm not accusing you of being a Feuerbachian, but I think that you should de-emphasise the idea of unconditional love in your work. Relatedly, in your four-fold dialectic of liberation you gave the final, fourth dimension as being a philosophical reflection on what had been achieved, but it seems to me that the philosophical reflection needs to go in before. This is something I don't understand about your treatment of Hegel, you seem to treat him as almost like a bourgeois sociologist rather than somebody who through philosophical elaboration managed to re-establish the dialectic in modern philosophy which was the ground for Marx to be able to then write his books.

**Roy.** First, there is a sense in which Marx was also a humanist, although he was quite correct in his critique of Feuerbach that he left out the necessary social and historical dialectical mediations, so I am not a Feuerbachian. In respect of Hegel, I think that maybe in *Dialectic* I was too tough on him and didn't give sufficient merit to him. The rational kernel of the Hegelian dialectic was a profound rediscovery and I accept my (perhaps) underplaying of it in *Dialectic* as a self-criticism. But it is still the case that in the mystical shell there is ontological monovalence – the absencing of the concept of absence – and with the concept of absence goes transcendence and the capacity to move to a greater totality, which is the rational kernel of

the dialectic. So he does eventually undermine himself. I don't think that there's much difference between myself and the questioner.

**Question.** You say that the slave has a right to say no, but your concept of freedom seems buried in the ontological depths; in the context of the world, in the context of political action, it doesn't engage in any level of practicality—

**Roy.** I think that what you're saying is that it's a very deep freedom, but Marx realised that it was characteristic of capitalist society that we had free labour – the worker had a choice (of a kind) whether to be a wage slave or not –and that differentiated it from, and was a progressive advance on, former modes of production. It is at that level of generality that I'm talking about freedom. Unless you accept it, you can't get very far in a liberatory or emancipatory direction. Once you accept it, you've still got all the spade work to do. What I'm trying to do is to restructure or reorient the parameters of our thought on these basic issues, not to say that we shouldn't be thinking about the local elections, or day to day bread and butter issues. ... Unless you start from unconditional love you won't get the right answer.

**Question.** How can we start from unconditional love? There are many problems about the whole concept that need to be unpacked. How for example can I love the tribe of fleas that infect my body and carry the plague, how can I love them unconditionally?

**Roy.** Firstly, you have to accept some sort of hierarchy of being. You talk about a moral dilemma for you, so we have to do this in discussion and presumably there will be rational ways of resolving it. Secondly, you have to consider in talking about unconditional love for a person what it is that you love about that person. I would say that what you should unconditionally love about a person is their intrinsic self, essential nature that would be what would have been called, in the olden days, their higher, noblest or best self, not all their vices and irritating habits, let alone the fleas that dwell in their pores.

**Question.** But we have to love all these things surely?

**Roy.** No, other things being equal, if it didn't get in the way of humans or other beings we should love fleas.

**Question.** But it is part of a flea's essential nature to bite

me. But you tell me that I should love them.

**Margaret.** No, he is talking about a hierarchy of being, just as Andrew's book was about this.

**Question.** Andrew was saying we should love all being.

**Margaret.** ...In due order.

**Roy.** There are two things, first there is a hierarchy of being, and secondly there is the question of what it is about those beings that you love; and you love their essential, best or highest qualities, and certainly biting Mervyn [the questioner] is not a very high quality of a flea. If you could have a population of fleas, isolated from human beings, there would be no reason not to love them because they have their own species existence.

**Question.** This is getting away from the point. Purpose, analysis, politics, practice. It is just not helpful to keep talking about unconditional love.

**Roy.** This is a starting point. We must still recognise different levels of discourse and philosophical discourse. In particular at the level of generality at which we are talking now, philosophy is providing a tool kit for the set of tools that you actually use in social analysis, it is underlabouring for underlabouring. It is at a very high level of generality and refinement, but it is necessary to get our concepts clear. Unless we get our categories clear, we won't be able to do all those nitty gritty things that some members of the audience want us to turn our attention to. That is the heart of social work and social change and social analysis. And that is what we talk about most of the time, but we have philosophical workshops and seminars like this to enable us to do our social analysis and social transformation in a more clear headed and hopefully more inspired way.

**Question.** You said that we are actually free, not merely potentially free, but then you say that we are actually oppressed.

**Roy.** Yes we are essentially, actually but only partially free, not completely. We are both free and oppressed: that is the dialectics of co-presence. The dialectic of liberation is a dialectic of disemergence, which turns fundamentally on shedding that part of ourselves which is heteronomous or unfree.

## DIALECTICAL CRITICAL REALISM: CALL FOR PAPERS

Last year, a call was put out on the Bhaskar List for papers on dialectical critical realism for a book in the *Critical Realism: Interventions* series. For a variety of reasons, it proved impossible to pursue the project at that time, but it is now intended to relaunch the idea. The aim is for a set of essays which discuss, elaborate, engage with the work of Roy Bhaskar on dialectics, particularly his books *Dialectic: the Pulse of Freedom* (1993) and *Plato Etc.* (1994).

If you are working in this area, and might be interested in contributing to this project, please contact Alan Norrie at the Law School, King's College London, Strand, London WC2R 2LS (email: alan.norrie@kcl.ac.uk).