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## From Science to Emancipation Manifesto of meta-Reality

*meta-Reality* is a new philosophical position devised by Roy Bhaskar, originator of the influential, international and multi-disciplinary philosophy of critical realism. It accepts but goes beyond critical realism, in so far as it pinpoints the reality of non-dual states and phases of being, showing how they underpin and sustain the totality of all forms of human, and indeed all, life. Understanding *meta-Reality* is to realise the limitations of the world of duality.

Critical realism already understands reality as structured and differentiated, as in process and changing, as a totality or whole and as containing human, potentially self-conscious, transformative agency. The world that humankind has made and which we currently inhabit is a world of duality: of unhappiness, oppression and strife—more especially, it is a world in which we are alienated from ourselves, each other, the activities in which we engage and the natural world we inhabit, currently hurtling into crisis and self-destruction.

The philosophy of *meta-Reality* describes the way in which this very world nevertheless depends upon, that is, is ultimately sustained by and exists only in virtue of the free, loving, creative, intelligent energy and activity of non-dual states of our being and

phases of our activity. In becoming aware of this we begin the process of transforming and overthrowing the totality of structures of oppression, alienation, mystification and misery we have produced; and the vision opens up of a balanced world and of a society in which the free development and flourishing of each unique human being is understood to be the condition, as it is also the consequence, of the free development and flourishing of all.

In developing this vision the philosophy of *meta-Reality* confirms and re-presents many aspects of the vision of the great philosophical traditions of the past, but does so in a radically new way, apt for contemporary times. We begin this process of becoming free, that is, of expanding the zone of non-duality within our lives, by becoming aware of all the elements that currently constitute them and throwing off all those elements which are inconsistent with our free, creative, loving natures. In this process we come to realise that the very world of misery and destitution we have created itself contains and is sustained by the seeds of a society of abundance, peace and fulfilment, in which we are all free to express and fulfil our essential natures.

## Preface

This book describes my journey from my presentations of critical realism in 1997, when I was already interested in and working on spiritual and transcendental questions, trying at once to relate them to my philosophical explorations and at the same time to the weaknesses and failures of socialist and more generally Left wing politics in the west; through to the position which I called transcendental dialectical critical realism, which I articulated in my book *From East to West*,<sup>1</sup> published in April 2000. And then the journey from that position, my first systematic attempt to integrate spirituality into the philosophical framework of critical realism, to the position which I now hold, which I have elaborated as the philosophy of meta-Reality.

The main difference between the philosophy of meta-Reality and critical realism, in all its forms, including the transcendental dialectical critical realist system articulated in *From East to West*, is that critical realism has been founded on the principle of non-identity, and as such reflects the limitations of the world of duality; whereas the philosophy of meta-Reality stresses identity, identification and unity; and the ubiquity and centrality of

<sup>1</sup> Routledge, London and New York, 2000.

*non-dual* states and phases of being in our social life. The philosophy of meta-Reality accepts critical realism, as hitherto developed, as being the best account of the *dual* world of relative reality. That is a world which is at present (as it has been, as far as we can tell, in most recorded history) dominated by the *dualistic* world of demi-reality, in which the dualities of the world of relative reality sharpen into antagonistic, oppositional splits, proliferating into gaping contradictions and producing profound alienation at all the planes of social being.

Critical realism possesses a huge advantage over irrealist philosophies, whether of an orthodox (which would include empiricism, neo-positivism, neo-Kantianism, hermeneutics, structuralism, post-structuralism, including ethnomethodology and discourse theory) or a heterodox sort (ranging from various Marxist to various postmodernist positions, including ones which have been generated in the wake of the rise of the new social movements, particularly feminism, ecology and the peace movement). The advantage of critical realism is this: that for the most part and to the greater extent, these irrealist philosophies merely reflect the surface structure of relative reality, the world of demi-real duality and the alienations, contradictions, reifications and dualisms of that world, which they merely replicate or elaborate in theory. Critical realism, in virtue of its commitment to the explicit thematisation of being and its understanding of the stratification of being and its development of the ideas of being as in process, as a totality and as incorporating transformative agency and reflexivity (as well as, in its latest, most contentious phase, a spiritual aspect) can show the possibilities of a non-dualistic world of duality, from which the structures which presently oppress us are shorn.

The deep structures which critical realism theorises are still however structures of duality, founded on principles of non-identity; and so they cannot penetrate through to the non-dual basis which underpins the whole world of duality, including the structures of oppression and alienation which currently dominate not only the world of duality but its non-dual basis or ground.

There are three ways in which the world of non-duality underpins the world of duality:

1. It underpins it in a very quotidian, ordinary way as being essential to the constitution, that is the reproduction and transformation, of everyday life. Let me go into this a little bit here. Most philosophers who have talked about non-dual or transcendence/transcendental experiences have regarded them as being something very extraordinary, only achieved in special places or moments of communion with the divine or in nature or in some other way consisting in a bliss, peak and very unusual experience. Moreover, normally the other term in the experience of union or identity is left mysterious. On the contrary, I argue, in developing the philosophy of meta-Reality that non-dual, including transcendental, experiences are essential for any form of communication between human beings, and ultimately any perception; and also for any act at all. For when you understand or even listen to what I say then in that moment of understanding or listening you are in a non-dual state of transcendental identification with me. Similarly, in order to act at all there must be something, at some level, which you do not do by thinking about how to do it, but which you just do, spontaneously, unconditionally, normally pretty effortlessly, and unless you acted in that non-dual way, you could never do anything at all. Moreover, in the case of communication, perception and action, the terms identified are clear enough: we are at one with another being or our action, and though we are not split or in duality, the terms which are identified are clearly defined, entities like you or me. In its most basic sense, transcendental identification is just unity with a context and there need be nothing mysterious about that.

In genealogical terms, elaboration of this moment of non-duality occurred to me by reflection of the way in which there was a non-algorithmic moment in any scientific revolution, discovery or even ordinary learning, that is a moment of pure creativity which could not be derived by induction or deduction or any mechanical formula. And it seemed clear to me that this was a very obvious paradigm of transcendence, with analogies to transcendence experiences in religion, art and other forms of life; but it was one, defining a moment of absolute transcendence in the movement of relative transcendence to a more totalising scientific or practical position, which was absolutely essential for the

understanding of (among other activities) science, the paradigmatic human activity for western philosophy from Descartes if not indeed Aristotle. An obvious question arose: what were the terms in the union when we had a moment of scientific or any other creativity, for in as much as it was a breakthrough, it was also a moment of emergence out of the blue. I came to see that this epistemological transcendence was quite consistent with ontological immanence. But in making full sense of this, I had to develop the idea of the moment of creativity, discovery or even simple learning (or re-creativity) as involving the union between something already enfolded within the discovering agent, brought up to consciousness by a moment of Platonic anamnesis or recall, with the alethic self-revelation of the being known, existing outside him. And this is of course, in all its terms—that of the subjective condition, the objective result and the union between the two—is a very radical theory of discovery, one applicable, however, to all spheres of learning and, *a fortiori*, to all human life.

So this is the first way in which the world of non-duality underpins the structures of duality, including dualism.

2. The second way in which non-duality underpins the world of duality depends on a feature of the stratification of being which critical realism should find it particularly easy to situate. Science reveals a hierarchy of strata in being; and such stratification is a very characteristic feature of all forms of activity and being. Theories of emancipation, whether secular or religious, have always posited a level of human nature or potential which, in some way, either man himself, or his existing social order, inhibits, stunts, suppresses or even altogether screens or occludes. The task of emancipation has characteristically been conceived as involving the throwing off of this emergent oppressive level which reposes on the primary, foundational but suppressed level. Christianity, Buddhism, Marxism, Western liberalism all involve the idea of human nature, which would usher in a better world, if only the structures which fetter it could be thrown off.

Now there is a crucial strengthening of this position which I would like to register. And that is that this level which actually underpins and sustains the world which we know must already

contain all, but not necessarily only, what we need to realise the utopian ideal. Thus we must assume that human nature, as it is constituted now, must be capable of sustaining a communist society in which, in Marx's vision of it, 'the free development of each is a condition of the free development of all', could be realised. And similarly, that human beings even now must be capable of being able to evaluate the realisation of all other beings in the universe as highly as their own, as in the ideal of the Bodhisattva. These are not utopian ideals. Rather, they point to or indicate a level which is an actual and continually efficacious condition of possibility for all states of being and systems of social order. This level of an essential human nature is actualised everywhere as a necessary condition for everything we do, it is a condition of the world which oppresses us and in which we oppress ourselves. Thus consider the phenomenon of war. This phenomenon, in a way the epitome of human hatred, is sustained only through the selfless solidarity of soldiers fighting at the front and the support they receive from their sisters, daughters and mothers at home.

This idea developed from an argument which made use of a concept I had already introduced in as early as *Dialectic: The Pulse of Freedom*,<sup>2</sup> namely that of an ultimatum, an ultimate or basic level of the universe which would have to be ingredient or immanent in all other levels of the universe emergent from it. This idea of an ultimatum is developed in the philosophy of meta-Reality into the idea of all beings having a *ground state*, which both embodies the qualities necessary to bind the universe together as a whole and at the same time is always specifically differentiated in the species or being concerned. Thus every species, and every being within a species, will in principle have a different ground state, but they will be united with every other ground state through, and at the level of the ultimatum, what I call the *cosmic envelope*. The ground state qualities of human beings consist *inter alia* in their energy, intelligence, creativity, love, capacity for right-action and the fulfilment of their intentionality or will in their objectifications in the natural and social world. It is the energy, intentionality and qualities of the ground state which are

<sup>2</sup> Verso, London and New York, 1993.

everywhere used and abused in the world of the emergent orders which they sustain, and which constitute the hidden or dominated basis or ground of all our alienation, suffering and ills.

This then is the second mode in which non-duality is central to social life and human agency. It is that level without which no other level could exist and have the particular properties they do, no matter how horrendous they are.

3. There is a third level, only slightly more recondite, in virtue of which non-duality can be said to underpin the world of duality and dualism. This is the sense in which if you go deeply enough into any aspect of being you will find buried in its fine structure or deep interior qualities which can only be described in terms of such quasi-metaphorical language as emptiness (*sunyata*), suchness (*tathata*), the void or the Buddha-nature, pure unbounded love or *sat-chit-anand*, that is the bliss consciousness of being which, whether you want to argue it possesses a teleological dynamic, in the sense that in some actual or metaphorical way all things strive for it (so that it would then be the fundamental driving force of evolution) it nevertheless, certainly constitutes, in interiorised form, the ground state of every moment of all being, the 'quiddity' of everything which is.

Whereas the first two modes of non-duality can be shown by relatively simple transcendental *arguments*, this third mode has to be *experienced*, and pertains to the experience of mystics and poets throughout the ages. However, these three modes are also inter-related. For if you go deeply enough into any non-dual state you are in, or into any being or object you have achieved transcendental identification with, ultimately you will come to *that* mystical experience, and when you do, you will be at one with *its* ground state in *your* ground state. At this point, we have, if you like, the unity or transcendental identification of two ground states.

These are not the only ways in which the philosophy of meta-Reality differentiates itself from existing critical realism. But this is not the place to articulate those further differences. My *Reflections on meta-Reality*<sup>3</sup> does that; and they have been system-

<sup>3</sup> Sage Publications, New Delhi, Thousand Oaks, London, April 2002.

atically set out in *The Philosophy of meta-Reality*,<sup>4</sup> where I show how we need to add two additional levels of ontology to the existing five of critical realism. The first, which I call the sixth realm (6R) of *re-enchantment*; and the second which I call the seventh zone or awakening (7Z/A) of *non-duality*, underpin the existing five levels which I rehearse in Chapter 1 of this book. Moreover these issues come up systematically throughout the book, and in the interview in Chapter 10 with Mervyn Hartwig, the differences between critical realism and meta-Reality are specifically thematised. It is also just worth mentioning here that this book has a companion, consisting in a sustained series of dialogues, *Fathoming the Depths of Reality: Savita Singh in Conversation With Roy Bhaskar*,<sup>5</sup> which retraces, in great detail the development of these ideas from their first seeds in the late 1960s and early 70s through to the present.

This book is based on talks given in Europe, Asia and America over the years 1997–2002. The most basic acknowledgment I need to make is that of my appreciation of and thanks to the organisers of the meetings, projects or programmes in which they were held, all voluntary contributions by people dedicated to the cause of free debate and discussion of these issues. Without such unconditional commitment none of these talks could have taken place. During the initial stages of the period covered by the talks in this book, my colleagues in the Centre for Critical Realism, and its sister organisation the International Association of Critical Realism, played a very important role. In particular I must mention Andrew Collier, Margaret Archer, Doug Porpora, Tony Lawson, Alan Norrie, Nick Hostettler, Sean Vertigan and Mervyn Hartwig. I was at one point intending to write a book with the first three of these, and a discussion which took place around some propositions which I had formulated on the basis of the discussions the four of us had had, is recorded in the interlude between Chapters 5 and 6. It will be apparent then that, though we were all committed to the importance of the philosophical discussion of issues

<sup>4</sup> *The Philosophy of meta-Reality Volume I: Creativity, Love and Freedom*, Sage Publications, New Delhi, Thousand Oaks, London, forthcoming.

<sup>5</sup> Sage Publications, New Delhi, Thousand Oaks, London, forthcoming.