



A brief introduction to the philosophy of meta-reality

Uma breve reflexão à filosofica da meta-realidade

Una breve reflexión a la filosófica de la meta-realidad

Gary Hawke (University of Greenwich)

Abstract

Bhaskar's Philosophy of meta-Reality (PMR) referred to as his spiritual turn, first began with his book *From East to West: Odyssey of a Soul* (2015b the second edition), and continued within the three main books of meta-Reality. This paper attempts to place PMR within the stream of Critical Realism (CR) and introduce to the reader two of the most importance elements of PMR, non-duality and the theory of transcendence. PMR further suggests that the serious of our philosophy in theory and practice comes from the account that it can make for its power of emancipation.

Keywords: Spirituality, meta-Reality, Bhaskar

Resumo

A filosofia da meta-Realidade (FMR) de Bhaskar refere-se a sua virada espiritual. Começou com o livro *Do Leste para o Oeste* e continuou com mais três livros. Este trabalho procura colocar a FMR na corrente do realismo crítico. Introduz o leitor a dois elementos mais importantes: a não-dualidade e a teoria da transcendência. A FMR sugere que a série de nossa filosofia, em teoria e prática, leva em conta o poder da emancipação.

Palavras-Chave: Espiritualidade, meta-Realidade, Bhaskar

Resumen

La filosofía de la meta-Realidad de Bhaskar se refiere a su viraje espiritual. Empezó con el libro "Do Leste para o Oeste" y siguió con más tres libros. Este trabajo busca colocar la filosofía de la meta-Realidad en la corriente del realismo crítico. Introduce al lector a dos elementos más importantes: la no dualidad y la teoría de la trascendencia. Tanto en la teoría como en la práctica, esa filosofía considera el poder de la emancipación.

Palabras Clave: Espiritualidad, meta-Realidad, Bhaskar



Forward

By way of orientating the reading to this introduction, I would like to explain something of my own dharma and how Bhaskar's Philosophy of metaReality has influenced it. For 10 years I have, as a dramatherapist, run workshops and retreat that one could call spiritual, or transpersonal. The aim of my work is to support the experience of non-duality. However, my greatest frustration was when the west took the eastern spiritual traditions idea of non-duality and spoke of it as being an awakening experience or an experience of enlightenment that you either experience spontaneously or worked hard to experience (Gilbert, E (Ed) 2011).

This idea of spontaneously v hard work made little sense to me; if, I argued, at an ontological level, there is freedom, all we need to do is take away the blocks to the experience of that freedom. Then in 2012, I came across the three books that form the constellation of Bhaskar's work on his philosophy of metaReality - Reflections on metaReality: Transcendence, Emancipation and Everyday Life, Sage Publication (2002), Reprint Routledge (2011), From Science to Emancipation: Alienation and the Actuality of Enlightenment, Sage Publications (2002), Reprint Routledge (2012), The Philosophy of metaReality: creativity, love and freedom, Sage Publications (2002), Reprint Routledge (2012). I was profoundly struck by the simple idea that non-duality is not a mystical metaphysical concept, that we work hard to achieve, or we just happen to spontaneously experience, it is the very causal power what allows society to interact, it is the meta-level, or cosmic envelope, without which you and I would not be able to understand each other as embodied personalities.

I was, and still am, overwhelmed by this simple explanation of the non-dual. It has changed my work, my ideas, and my view of what true or alethic freedom is. It is my hope that you too may though this short introduction begin to experience what I began to experience as I learnt to understand metaReality, a connection to the pulse of freedom.

The paper

In this paper, my aim is to introduce the reader to Bhaskar's Philosophy of metaReality (PMR). However, I do not believe that it is possible to do justice to PMR without situating the philosophy within the stream of Bhaskar's development of Critical Realism (CR). There is also the further problem of the spiritual turn (Cravens S, 2010) and how best to navigate Bhaskar's use of eastern spiritual philosophical ideas into his philosophy.

Through out this paper I would recommend that the reader maintain a connection to two vital ideas within CR – The Intransitive dimension and the Transitive dimension. The Intransitive is the dimension where things exist even if we have no knowledge of them. And in CR things are not just objects, they can be reasons, or relationships, anything can be a thing so long as it has causal power, so for example within PMR Love is a thing that exists as it has causal power.



The Transitive is the dimension in which we have knowledge of things or when the thing has effect on us. For example, "I did not know you loved me until you shared your love for me".

It could also be possible to say that because you have not had an experience of the existence of God, (or as we get deeper into this introduction, the non-dual), does not mean that God does not exist. This argument is made in such CR books as *Transcendence: Critical Realism and God* (2004) and *A Fresh Look at Islam in a Multi-Faith World: a philosophy for success through education* (2015).

It is the structure of this argument that enables Bhaskar to maintain adherence to the CR principle of "seriousness in your philosophy" when he speaks of one of the most important elements of PMR the non-dual.

It is here in the area of the non-dual that I would like to begin this introduction. In *Reality and Self-Realization: Bhaskar's Metaphilosophical Journey Toward Non-Dual Emancipation*. Mingyu Seo (2014) suggested that we could see the development of CR as a move from dualism to dualistic to non-dual.

Original CR developed by Bhaskar in his first two books *A Realist Theory of Science* and *The Possibility of Naturalism* is a project of the re-vindication of ontology in both social science and natural science. It attempts this by noticing the split between ontology and epistemology, and how philosophy commits the epistemic fallacy, taking what we know for what is, which makes a philosophy anthropocentric. Dualism here is the mind body problem, the split between facts and values, or society and individual. Dualism is the demi-real, a term used by Bhaskar to indicate that we may feel that something is real but this is ultimately based on a false belief.

If we acknowledge that the world is stratified and within the stratification, there are emergence properties, synchronic emergent properties material (Bhaskar 2015a: 97) offers that mind is an emergence property of matter, but cannot be reduce to matter. Applying explanatory critique (Bhaskar 2015a: 120) we can see that facts all things considered can become values. The transformational model of social activity (Bhaskar 2015a: 34) shows that an individual is thrown into a society but has the power to effect change within that society, so society exists before me, but I can change society.

With dualism addressed and ontology placed back within philosophy, Bhaskar moves onto the next stage of CR that of engaging with the dualistic world or the world of the relative realm. Why is the relative realm the dualistic world, Seo suggests that this can best be answered by seeing the dualistic world as a domain of mediation between the dualism of demi real and non-dual of the metaReal, the dualistic world is the relative real world that we live in.

Within this real we find the constellational aspect that is brought out through the dialectic, yet unlike Hegel's dialectic that aims to create a closed totality of the world, Bhaskar in *Dialectical Critical Realism* (DCR) shows that the world is an open totality subject to change and difference. It is only within a dialectical moment of non-identify can we come to know the world or know the concert universal/singular.



The structure of DCR is best described through how Bhaskar applies his MELD schema to the relationship of being, the first level (1M) is a level, which thinks or understands being as such and being as non-identity. The second level, (2E), explores being as process, being as involving negativity, change and absence. The third level (3L) explores being as together as internally related and as a whole. The fourth level (4D) understands being as incorporating transformative praxis. (Bhaskar 2012b preface xlix)

The dialect then is a deepening process of knowing the stratified constellational nature of being.

If CR is a philosophy of science and DCR is a philosophy of dialects, PMR is a philosophy of freedom, love, and creativity; it is a philosophy about you and me, a philosophy that offers identity over difference, unity over split, it is also a philosophy of the non-dual.

Let me stop for a moment and recall a story that Bhaskar use to tell when he talked about PMR, as you move about a busy street how is it that you do not bump into people, even though you may be lost in your thoughts as you walk down the street, you still do not bump into people. What is happening here is a moment of non-duality, you are one with the mass of people, and yet you are an individual. When you watch a movie or read a book, or even as you read this paper, you are moving beyond yourself, entering into something that is not you, you are removing yourself from yourself, this is the non-dual. When we listen to each other, in the moment of listening this is the non-dual. The non-dual for PMR is not just an eastern spiritual metaphor for being enlightened, it is a real thing, it is an intransitive causal power that when actualised transitively allows both you and I to meet, it allows society to flourish.

In *The Philosophy of metaReality: Creativity, love and freedom* (2012), Bhaskar describes the non-dual as:

The basis or ground of the realm of duality, which is non-duality as the non-dual being of ground-state and cosmic envelope. The way in which we communicate with other beings, especially human beings, but even more generally, perceive, see, read, follow, understand things in the world; and as a necessary component for any action at all, including speech, thought, etc. The deep interior or fine structure of any aspect of being, which through the power of perception, of awareness can be traced back to its ground-state, which provides, as we shall see, a powerful way of disconnecting elements and forms of heteronomy both inside and outside the field of an embodied personality. (Bhaskar 2012b: 2)

There are three things that need to be explored here, as we begin to understand PMR, the cosmic envelope, ground-state, and embodied personality. The cosmic envelope is the space, from which all things manifest, we have encountered a similar idea before in DCR the concrete universal, all things are interconnected at the cosmic envelope, both you and I are one within the cosmic envelope. When I am at my ground-state or I am at concrete singular, I am in flow, or I have dropped free of my ego, I no longer live in the demi-real, I am, to use a yogachara term, free of our kleshas, unwholesome mind and



thoughts. Free of these egoic contradictions I am then able to engage in the world in right action as an embodied personality at the level of interpersonal relationships, the level of our material transaction, such as work, and social settings, on the level of intrapersonal relationships, and at the level of the natural world.

To extend the MELD scheme to include PMR the fifth level, (5A), understand being as reflexive and generally interior. The sixth level, called (6R) understands being as being re-enchantment. The seventh level (7Z) understands being as incorporating the primacy of identity over difference and unity over split and in particular understands being as non-duality.

In the closing paragraph of *Dialectic: The Pulse of Freedom* (2008: 385) Bhaskar writes:

“Alethic truth, as optimally grounding reason, can be the rational cause of transformative negating agency in absencing constraints on self-emancipation, that is, on the liberation of our causal powers to flourish. For to exist is to be able to become, which is to possess the capacity for self-development, a capacity that can be fully realized only in a society founded on the principle of universal concretely singularized human autonomy in nature. This process is dialectic; and it is the pulse of freedom.”

This idea of the pulse of freedom is taken up and becomes the manifesto of PMR:

“The philosophy of metaReality 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.” (Bhaskar 2012: vii)

Having set out the aims of PMR, explored the use of the non-dual, and shown how PMR links back to CR and DCR it becomes possible to see how the 17 basic principles of PMR are sublations of Bhaskar’s early works.

1. The Principle of the Inexorability of Ontology (irreducibility of being)
2. The Principle of the All-inclusiveness of Ontology
3. The Principle of Dispositional Realism
4. The Principle of Categorical Realism
5. The Principle of Alethic Realism
6. The Principle of the TINA Formation
7. The Definition of Liberation as Shedding;



8. The Understanding of Liberation as Dependent on Asymmetry
9. The Theory of the Ground-state;
10. The Theory of the Cosmic Envelope
11. The Theory of Transcendence
12. The Principle of Transcendental Identification in My Consciousness
13. The Principle of Co-presence
14. The Principle of the Primacy of Self-Referentiality
15. The Principle of Re-enchanting Reality
16. The Principle of an Unlimited or Unbounded Self
17. The Principle of MetaReality

Within this paper, it is not possible to explore all of the 17 principles, what I would like to do therefore is take time to explore just one principle, which I also think will be beneficial to the reader, when thinking about how one might apply PMR. This is also inline with my own personal journey into Critical Realism.

I first contacted Roy Bhaskar in 2012, as I wanted to explore the unpublished volume four of PMR: The Workins. Bhaskar believed that if we wanted emancipation from occlusions we needed to work on the blocks, just as we work out in the gym, he felt that we should work in, to explore our own embodied personality and look to how one creates a deeper finer connection to the non-dual, which is at the heart of the metaReal.

Principle 11 the theory of transcendence states there are four ways in which we can experience transcendence or the non-dual.

Transcendence into or Transcendental Retreat or Clearing, this is a sense, in which we step back from objectivity and notice our own subjective experience, a great gestalt exercise here is to ask, what do I see, what do I notice, what do I feel, what do I know, what do I not know. In keeping with the first Moment and second Edge of MELD - this is non-identify, and absence, we do not just accept the object or thing we step back notice the gap between observer and observed and within the gap ask what is there.

Transcendence into or Transcendental Identification in consciousness, as we move fully into the object or things, noticing our connection, we become part a new level or totality of connectedness, which related to the 3L of MELD, this can be simply experience when we look at a flower, a sunset, or a beautiful painting, there is no longer a gap.

Transcendence On or Transcendental Agency, this is when we are completely active within the act, it is both being mindful and mindless, our agency is focused, it is alive, and it is free. I began writing this paper at 8 am it is now 6 pm, and throughout that time, I have focused completely on the creative act of writing, not aware that so much time has gone by.

Transcendence With or Transcendental Teamwork, this is the moment when you and I work mindfully, when there appears to be one mind at work, such as when playing sports,



it is the group unity in the moment. Both Transcendental teamwork and Agency are the transformative praxis of 4D within MELD.

For me the four Ts are at the heart of PMR, for without transcendence there can be no love, and without love can be no creativity, and without creative there is no drive for freedom, and without a drive for freedom, we will never break the blocks that occlude our emancipation.

The philosophy of metaReality is a philosophy of emancipation; it calls us out to, be more that we are. It demands that we do the work of freeing not just ourselves but all sentient beings, it has a profound ecology, we are both of the world and in the world, and as such, we need to protect the world. It is a philosophy allowing for difference as an aspect of identity. It makes room for both western and eastern philosophy, and it extends Bhaskar's project of maintaining the importance of the intransitive and transitive.

It paves the way for the next step in CR, interdisciplinary, and Bhaskar's move into education, disability studies, well being, ecology, and conflict management.

Moreover, it is a philosophy of love.

“Love in fact may be thought of as being a basic or defining characteristic of transcendental identification or union as such, a binding characteristic at the level of the cosmic envelope, and a cohering or binding force in social life”.
(Bhaskar 2012b: 7)

The philosophy of metaReality, is a philosophy of theory/practice consistency, it offers a view of the world in which we are at the deepest and finest level connected, it suggested, that this deep ontological level, can be known if we are prepared to undertake the practice of letting go of the personal and social blocks that occlude our freedom. It is a radical departure from what went before within critical realism, but when viewed within the stream of the development of critical realism, from dualism to duality to non-dual, it is possible to retroduct metaReality thinking within Bhaskar's early stages of critical realism. I would go as far to say that the philosophy of metaReality under-labours for original critical realism and dialectical critical realism. At the beginning of critical realism Bhaskar asked what must the world be like for science to exists, with metaReality Bhaskar now asks what must the world be like for you and I to live free.

References

- Archer, M S, Collier, A, Porpora, D V (2014). **Transcendence: Critical Realism and God**. London: Routledge.
- Bhaskar, R (2008a) . **A Realist Theory of Science**. London: Routledge.
- Bhaskar, R (2008b). **Dialectic: The Pulse of Freedom**. London: Routledge.
- Bhaskar, R (2011). **Reflections on metaReality: Transcendence, Emancipation and Everyday Life**. Reprint Routledge.



Bhaskar, R (2012). **From Science to Emancipation: Alienation and the Actuality of Enlightenment**, Reprint Routledge.

Bhaskar, R (2012b). **The Philosophy of metaReality: creativity, love and freedom** Reprint Routledge.

Bhaskar, R (2015a). **The Possibility of Naturalism**. The fourth edition, London: Routledge.

Bhaskar, R (2015b). **From East to West: Odyssey of a Soul**. The second edition, London: Routledge.

Creaven, S (2011). **Against the Spiritual Turn: Marxism, Realism, and Critical Theory**. London: Routledge.

Gilbert, E (Ed) (2011) **Conversations in Non Duality: Twenty Six Awakenings**. Conscious.tv.

Seo, M (2014). **Reality and Self-Realization: Bhaskar's Metaphilosophical Journey Toward Non-Dual Emancipation**. London: Routledge.

Shun'ei, T (2009). **Living Yogacara: An Introduction to Consciousness**, US: Wisdom Publications.

Wilkinson, M (2015). **A Fresh Look at Islam in a Multi-Faith World: a philosophy for success through education**. London: Routledge.

Recebido em 31 de agosto de 2015.

Aprovado em 15 de fevereiro de 2016.

Gary Hawke

Trained as a Dramatherapist at the University of Roehampton and a teacher at the University of Greenwich. His work has seen him provide dramatherapy for the homeless, people dealing with substance misuse, children, young adults on the autistic spectrum, the elderly and corporate clients. He began to integrate critical realism into his therapy work in 2012 and was supported by Roy Bhaskar in developing a critical realism therapeutic approach called alethic coaching. In 2013 and 2014, he presented on the alethic coaching model at the international conference on critical realism, since then he has delivered a number of presentations on the model to students at the Institute of Education in London. In 2014, he worked with Roy Bhaskar on a video project, which aimed to introduce the three stages of critical realism to a wider audience. Gary is currently working with the transcription of the video series and hopes to publish the text as a Beginners Guide to Critical Realism. E-mail: alethic.coaching@gmail.com