

*Frauley, J. & Pearce, F. (eds) Critical Realism and the Social Sciences: Heterodox Elaborations* University of Toronto Press 2007 336 pp. £40 (hardback)

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If diversity and internal debate are symptomatic of a healthy research tradition, this edited collection is good news for critical realism. The papers it contains coalesce around two broad themes: the diverse (and often critical) responses of self-proclaimed critical realists to the various turns in the work of Roy Bhaskar, and the value of reaching out beyond the realist tradition to connect up with other schools of thought.

Perhaps the pivotal paper as far as the first theme is concerned is Garry Potter's. Potter takes as a framework Bhaskar's account of the development of critical realism as five moments in his own work. The first is the 'transcendental realism' of *A Realist Theory of Science*; the second the 'critical naturalism' of *The Possibility of Naturalism*; the third the concept of explanatory critique, developed most clearly in *Scientific Realism and Human Emancipation*; the fourth the dialectical turn in *Dialectic and Plato Etc.*; and the fifth is the spiritual turn that was inaugurated with *From East to West*. Potter suggests that most critical realists are convinced by the first two moments, but become increasingly uneasy as we progress through the further developments in Bhaskar's thought.

Potter's own critique begins with a full frontal assault on the spiritual turn. He locates the real problem in Bhaskar's work further back, however, in the fourth-moment concept of 'alethic truth', the idea that things in themselves or the generative mechanisms that produce them, as opposed to the claims we make about them, can be true. As Potter puts it, 'Alethic truth is ontological truth, and [thus...] simply a category mistake. Truth is inescapably

epistemological' (p. 92). It is on the basis of alethic truth, Potter argues, that Bhaskar constructs his case for God, and indeed there is a suspicion that the explanatory critiques of the third moment also rest on a similar foundation.

Despite Potter's confidence that moment two is generally accepted by critical realists, aspects of it are queried by no less than three of the other authors (Benton, in his foreword, Pearce, and Engelskirchen). Meanwhile, Benton, Pearce, Sayer, and López all query aspects of the third, the claim that social science and philosophy can provide us with watertight logical justifications for emancipatory politics. Here Sayer offers the richest alternative, arguing that we must recognise that human beings are inherently needy and emotional, and that an emancipatory politics must be developed by working out how we can help humanity to flourish given our needs. For Sayer this is not a task to be solved by philosophical logic but by practical engagement. And as López adds, it is a task that depends upon a sociological understanding of how emancipatory claims can become accepted that critical realists have so far failed to develop. As regards the fourth moment, Chodos *et al* add their weight to Potter's critique of alethic truth, while Sayer offers a critique of Bhaskar's dialectical understanding of absence, oddly concealed in a footnote. Only Benton explicitly joins Potter in his critique of the spiritual turn. This is a little surprising as in my experience many more critical realists in the social sciences question these last two moments than the earlier ones. Only a small band of critical realists still defend every turn in Bhaskar's thought, most pertinently Mervyn Hartwig in his incendiary attack on this collection in the *Journal of Critical Realism* (8:2 2009). The rest of us reserve the right to take what we find useful from Bhaskar's work without committing ourselves to the rest.

The second theme appears in three papers relating critical realism to Marxism, as we might expect (Albritton, Engelskirchen, and Ehrbar), but also more surprisingly in a well-written paper examining the minimal realism of Gadamer (Chodos *et al*). The most interesting set of connections, however, comes from no less than five authors relating critical realism to Foucault. There have been a number of attempts in the past to claim Foucault as a realist, but this collection offers a variety of different perspectives. Although these could be read as

conflicting views, we might also stitch them together into an argument that runs something like this: Foucault has been misappropriated by traditions that have erased important realist tendencies in his thinking, including both postmodernists (according to Woodiwiss) and empiricists in governmentality studies (Frauley); his ontology in fact contains elements that overlap with realism although it would be an exaggeration to simply say that he *is* a realist (Day, and perhaps Datta); and as a consequence it is viable for realists to employ elements of his work, particularly the earlier work on discursive formations, while retaining a realist ontology (López). Perhaps the most novel of these papers is Day's, who sees Foucault as sharing a poststructuralist ontology with Deleuze, Guattari and Lacan, in which the social world consists of diverse strata but instead of being structured hierarchically as realists would argue these strata are profusely interdependent and mutually implicated. Whether or not this is an accurate representation of *Foucault's* thinking, it certainly opens up the debate on ontology.

Beyond these two themes, there is an excellent paper by Murphy on theorising across the culture/nature divide, illustrated by one of the few empirical discussions in the book, and an intriguing attempt by Sismondo to argue for a mix of *both* realism and anti-realism in science studies.

As with any such collection, many doubts could be raised concerning individual contributions, but overall this is a valuable and important book, not only in terms of its content but also as an indicator of some of the key contemporary debates amongst critical realists. It is revealing that some of the most perceptive and telling criticisms of elements of the realist tradition come from within it, while the willingness to engage with other traditions demonstrates a creative openness that promises continuing development of a diverse research tradition.