Critical Realism

Dave Elder-Vass

*** This is a pre-publication version of a chapter to be published in G. Delanty & S.P. Turner (eds.), *Routledge International Handbook of Contemporary Social and Political Theory*. ***

Critical realism is a relatively recent tradition in the philosophy of science that was originated primarily by Roy Bhaskar. It has been adopted and developed across a wide range of social science disciplines, where it offers a methodological alternative to both positivism and interpretivism. On the one hand, critical realists are oriented to the production of causal explanations but see these in very different terms than traditional positivists. On the other, they see interpretive work and constructionist arguments as important and useful as long as they are not taken to exclude recognition of other causal forces.

A philosophy *for* science

Bhaskar's work falls into several phases but it is his early work, sometimes known as *original* critical realism, that has been most influential in the social sciences, and in particular his first two books *A Realist Theory of Science* (1975) and *The Possibility of Naturalism* (1979).

The central thrust of twentieth century philosophy of science was to challenge the positivist conception of science as an enterprise that accumulated true causal laws deduced from unmediated experience of the natural world. Bhaskar is part of this tradition but breaks with the dominant tendency to focus on epistemological challenges to the quality of scientific knowledge. Instead, he begins by developing a different kind of critique of positivism, focusing in particular on Hume's argument that causality is nothing more than a constant conjunction or exceptionless pattern in which events of one particular type are always followed by events of another particular type. He approaches this by accepting the positivist assumption that science is *successful* in delivering worthwhile knowledge (without making the naïve realist assumption that the knowledge it produces must be *true*), but then asks the ontological question of what the world must be like for this to be the case.

Bhaskar argues that if we examine how science works (his argument is premised specifically on laboratory science but arguably could be derived equally well from considering other varieties of science) we can see that science would not make sense if causality was merely a constant conjunction of events. Laboratory scientists design experiments with the objective of producing empirical regularities but they do this by excluding factors that would normally interfere with those regularities. They then treat their findings as applying in some way to the world beyond the lab, even in cases where scientists like themselves are not preventing other forces from interfering (Bhaskar 1975: 13). This only makes sense if the causal forces they observe are *tendencies* generated by objects of the type they are observing, rather than exceptionless regularities (Bhaskar 1975: 14). If they *were* exceptionless regularities, then it would not be necessary for scientists to create laboratory conditions to study them in the first place. This leads to his alternative account of causality as the contingent interaction of multiple causal powers:

> The real basis of causal laws are provided by the generative mechanisms of nature. Such generative mechanisms are, it is argued, nothing other than the ways of acting of things. And causal laws must be analysed as their tendencies. Tendencies may be regarded as powers or liabilities of a thing which may be exercised without being manifest in any particular outcome (1975: 14).

Causal powers do not always produce the outcomes they tend towards, because every event is *co-determined* by multiple interacting causal powers and so any given causal power will sometimes be inhibited by other conflicting powers. Hence, we have causality even when there is no exceptionless regularity of outcome.

The powers of a thing, in turn, are produced by mechanisms that depend on its structure. Bhaskar sees causal powers as emergent: as distinct from the powers of the components of the thing possessing the power, though not in any mysterious way. Causal powers are emergent in the sense that they are possessed by whole entities but not by their parts, only coming about when the parts are organised into particular higher level structures and produced by the ways in which those parts interact when they are organised in this way (Elder-Vass 2010a: 16–8).

Bhaskar's critique, however, is not only focused on positivism. He is equally critical of the collapse of reference and representation that is characteristic of much postmodern thinking, including radically sceptical forms of social constructionism, but which is also implicit in the

work of Immanuel Kant, which has shaped much of modern philosophy. For Kant, there is an empirical world that we experience, and a noumenal world beyond it that we cannot experience, and our knowledge can only be knowledge of the empirical world. Such knowledge is inevitably shaped by our preconceptions and so there is a sense in which our knowledge is only ever knowledge of something that is already internal to us. For Bhaskar, by contrast, we *can* have (necessarily fallible) knowledge of the world as it exists independently of what we think about it, although some of our knowledge takes the form of theories and concepts that we employ to make sense of the world. Unlike Kantianism, this is a non-dualistic understanding of our relation to the world: we are part of the same world that we have knowledge about, and the distinction between our knowledge and the world beyond us is *internal* to the world; both me (including my beliefs) and the things I can see, for example, are different pieces of the same world.

Bhaskar makes an analytical distinction between what he calls the *intransitive dimension* and the *transitive dimension* of our knowing relation to the world (1975: 21–4). This is analytic in the sense that it is specific to a particular claim, and the line between the two will be drawn in different places for different people and their knowledge of different things, rather than a once and for all division of the whole world into two separate parts. The *intransitive* dimension refers to the things that our knowledge is about, that exist independently of our particular beliefs about them. The *transitive* dimension refers to the concepts, theories, and the like that structure our understanding of the intransitive dimension in any particular case. Our beliefs arise from an interaction between the transitive and the intransitive dimensions, in which our experience of interacting with the intransitive can lead us to question and revise our transitive beliefs.

This distinction is drawn in such a way as to pass successfully from laboratory science to the social sciences, a move that comes in Bhaskar's second book *The Possibility of Naturalism* (1979). Social structures are also seen as having emergent causal powers, and this is consistent with their being both dependant on the activities of people and dependent on "agents' conceptions of what they are doing" (1979: 38). To put it in the terms introduced above, the powers of social structures are emergent in the sense that they are possessed by social structures but not by the individual people (and often other things) that are the parts of those structures. These powers only come about when the parts are organised into structures that depend on the understandings of the people, and on the ways in which those people (and other parts) interact when they come into these sorts of relations with each other. Those

structures may then develop as the beliefs and activities of the people change, in what Bhaskar calls the Transformational Model of Social Activity (1979: 33–6). With this in mind, we can see why Bhaskar's transitive/intransitive distinction works better than the simple realist claim that the world is independent of human beliefs about it. The problem for that argument is that the social world is *not* independent of our beliefs about it – the state only works, for example, because we have a concept of government, we believe it is legitimate, and we recognise the demands it makes on us as coming from the state. But for any particular individual seeking to make sense of the state there *is* a distinction between the beliefs that other people have that sustain the state (which fall into the intransitive dimension for our individual) and the individual's own theories about the state (which fall into her transitive dimension). So I can recognise *both* that the state, or any other social structure, depends on the beliefs that people have, but *also* that it has an existence that is independent of what I personally may think about it.

The implications of critical realism for epistemology are neatly summarised in the three principles of ontological realism, epistemic (or epistemological) relativism, and judgemental rationality (Bhaskar 1986: 24, 2016: 25–6). If one accepts that there is a real world that is largely external to and independent of any one observer and her beliefs about it, and that we have some capacity to be influenced in our beliefs by that world, then it follows that our beliefs can be proven wrong by further experience. Bhaskar's ontological realism therefore entails fallibilism about belief, and his acknowledgement of the transitive dimension of belief further implies that our beliefs will be sensitive to the social or discursive context in which they are developed (1979: 57). He advocates a philosophy that "would unashamedly acknowledge as a corollary of its realism, the historicity, relativity and essential transformability of all our knowledge" (1989: 155). Hence, his realism implies that we must be epistemic relativists: knowledge claims are necessarily uncertain and influenced by social factors. He rejects, however, strong forms of relativism in which it is concluded that all judgements are determined by social forces and therefore that we have no objective basis for making judgements between competing claims. On the contrary, he insists that epistemic relativism is consistent with judgemental rationality: that we have the capacity to come to justified (though necessarily fallible) conclusions about many questions. In terms of our conclusions about the nature of external reality, our interaction with that reality provides us with strong evidence that may be influenced by our transitive preconceptions but is not fully

determined by those preconceptions. That often gives us a reasonable basis for making judgements of empirical fact.

Bhaskar's critique, then, leads not just to a philosophy *of* science but to a philosophy *for* science, in the sense that it provides us with a framework for making sense of what scientists are doing that can be employed by scientists themselves. Although the framework has had little influence on natural scientists, it has been adopted enthusiastically by some social scientists.

Structure and agency

Here critical realism has intervened in many central theoretical debates. Perhaps the most influential contributions are to debates on the question of structure and agency. We have already seen that Bhaskar is committed to the causal significance of social structure, but he also sees human agency as causally significant. As Margaret Archer makes clear, human agents are also entities with emergent properties, and critical realism shows us how *both* individual agency and social structure can be causally important to our understanding of social events (1995). The concept of multiple determination of events by many interacting causes allows us to say that events are not determined by any single force, be it structural or agential, but rather by the interaction of both structural and agential powers (and indeed the causal powers of non-social objects) (Elder-Vass 2010a).

It may seem puzzling, however, to say that both structural and agential powers interact to produce events when we have already recognised that social structures depend for their powers on people. Critical realists have put forward multiple arguments to justify treating social structures as having powers in their own right despite their dependence on people. Archer argues that we can understand both social reproduction and social transformation as consequences of what she calls the *morphogenetic cycle* (Archer 1995: 154–9). Before any sequence of social events we have pre-existing social structures such as the state, powerful organisations and unequal distributions of resources. Individuals are aware of at least some of the structures that they are faced with and make decisions to act that are shaped in part by their understanding of the constraints and opportunities created by these structures. Their actions then contribute to either reproducing or transforming those structures, which then provide a new (or unchanged) set of constraints and opportunities to be taken into account in the next cycle.

This still leaves open the question of why we are justified in treating the structures concerned as having powers of their own, or structural emergent properties as Archer calls them (Archer 1995: 172–83). Archer's answer is temporal: structures are material sedimented products of past action that continue to have influence in the present and so are able to interact with individual humans. She is particularly strongly opposed to what she calls elision or central conflation: attempts to collapse structure into agency as if they were merely two aspects of the same thing, for example in Giddens's notion of structures as rules within the individuals affected by them (Archer 1995: 93–134).

In a largely complementary argument, Elder-Vass suggests we can see social structures as entities composed of people and often other material parts that have emergent causal powers in the sense introduced earlier. An organisation, for example, is composed (at any given time) of a set of people and things, related to each other in ways that depend on their roles in the organisation, and as a result of these parts acting in accordance with their roles the organisation as a whole has causal powers that the parts would not have if they were not related to each other in the way they are when they become parts of the organisation (Elder-Vass 2010a: 144–68). This means that we may be able to explain how the organisation comes to have the powers that it does in terms of the interactions between its parts, but such explanations are not reductive – they do not dissolve the claim that the causal power concerned belongs to the organisation rather than its parts – because the power only exists when the organisation does.

We can also justify claims for human agency in a similar vein: we cannot reduce the powers of individual humans to powers of their biological parts because those parts must be assembled into a functioning human before the powers come to exist. Critical realism also, however, provides more extended accounts of the nature of agency, in particular Archer's work on the nature of reflexivity (a term she uses as a synonym of agency as it is usually understood, having used *agency* itself somewhat differently in her earlier work). For Archer, humans are fundamentally decision-making beings, who ponder their options in *internal conversations*, a concept she draws from the work of George Herbert Mead. This is not, however, a rationalistic approach to decision making – it is grounded at least partly in our emotions, which she sees as providing a commentary on the relationship between our situation at any one time and our deepest concerns. Those concerns themselves develop in a process that defines our personal identity, and then influence our major decisions about our

careers and personal commitments, thus producing our social identity (Archer 2000: 193–249).

These identity commitments then feed into our decision making, but they are mediated through the process of internal conversation, and on the basis of an empirical study, Archer has argued that there are several different styles of internal conversation, with different people tending to adopt different styles (Archer 2003). Communicative reflexives tend to consult people they are close to and take account of their inputs as part of the process; autonomous reflexives tend to be more independent and more focused on their own benefits (and thus closer to the rationalistic model); and meta-reflexives tend to be more self-critical and reflect on the wider implications of their choices.

Some other critical realists have argued that we need an account of agency that blends Archer's focus on conscious deliberation with the ways in which socialisation can shape our subconscious dispositions and orientations. Both Andrew Sayer and Elder-Vass, for example, have argued that Bourdieu's concept of the *habitus* can be combined with Archer's work to produce an account of human agency that recognises both that we sometimes make conscious decisions and also that our action is influenced by social forces that have contributed to shaping the kinds of people that we are (Elder-Vass 2010a: 87–114; Sayer 2009). Archer, on the other hand, sees Bourdieu as another elisionist and *habitus* as another form of the collapse of structure into the individual (Archer 2003: 11–2).

Realism, constructionism and method

While realism in general has often been seen as opposed to theories of social construction, critical realism has a more nuanced relation to constructionism(Sayer 2009) . If we may take social construction as the view that features of the world depend for their existence on how we collectively think or talk about them, then critical realism is committed to a constructionist view of some things but not others. Bhaskar himself saw social structures as concept dependent (Bhaskar 1979: 38) and challenged the argument that realism and constructionism are incompatible (Bhaskar 1993a: 186). Sayer has argued that realism is entirely compatible with what he calls weak constructionism but not with strong constructionism (Sayer 2000a: 62). Christian Smith rejects the strong constructionist claim that "Reality itself for humans is a human, social construction" but accepts the weak

constructionist claim that knowledge is socially influenced and in turn helps to produce institutional facts (Smith 2010: 121–2).

Smith argues that constructionists have been misled by the Kantian tradition in philosophy: "A realist account of social constructionism needs to replace the too-dominant image of humans as primarily *perceivers of* reality with the image of humans as *natural participants in* reality" (Smith 2010: 170). Kant takes the view that we can never perceive the world as it is in itself because our experience is always filtered through innate categories. This argument has been adapted by a neo-Kantian tradition in social theory to argue that we can only experience the world through socially-acquired categories and hence that our perception and understanding of reality is entirely a product of these socially-acquired categories (Elder-Vass 2012: 244–6). But once we recognise that we are not just observers of reality but participants in it, we must also recognise that the world around us also influences our perceptions, and that although our categories are influenced socially they are also constrained by the influence of the objects we perceive. Indeed, constructionism depends on the belief that we *can* perceive the sounds and texts through which discursive influence is communicated to us and so it becomes incoherent if it denies that we have any perceptual access to the material world (Elder-Vass 2012: 246–50).

The net result is that critical realists deny that material objects are socially constructed (although some of our beliefs about them may be) but accept that social structures are. The difference is that social structures depend for their existence on how we think about them. A banknote, for example, has a material existence that is independent of our beliefs about the banknote and so that material existence is not socially constructed. Money, on the other hand, does depend for its existence (as money) on our beliefs. An item is only money if it is positioned as an acceptable means of payment within a community (Lawson 2019: 155–65). Money is therefore socially constructed even though banknotes (or some of the other items that could be positioned as money, such as cows or conch shells) are not.

This perspective, in which social events are seen as causally produced by a mix of agential, structural, material and discursive forces, leads to a pluralism about methods of research in the social sciences. In terms of the classic divide in social science methods, critical realists reject both the exclusive focus on meaning and thus on qualitative research characteristic of interpretivist perspectives and the exclusion of meaning and consequent quantitative orientation characteristic of positivism. Because social structures are concept dependent,

understanding meaning is an important step in making sense of how they work, but this remains a step in a causal analysis. That causal analysis, however, cannot be conducted in purely quantitative terms since causes do not typically produce consistent quantitative regularities in the world. As Doug Porpora puts it, (some) realists run regressions, but they do not consider that regressions generate causal explanations (Porpora 2015: 31–64). Rather, regressions and other quantitative techniques provide us with evidence of statistical relationships – what Tony Lawson calls demi-regularities (Lawson 1997: 204–9) – which can sometimes be useful clues in the search for causal mechanisms. Realist methods are focused, on the one hand, on the identification of causal mechanisms, and on the other, on analysing how particular sets of causal mechanisms interact to produce particular events or types of events. Given this orientation, almost all of the established social science methods are available to realists. Those coming to critical realism for the first time can be frustrated by the lack of authoritative advice on 'the' critical realist method, but a great deal of work has been done on how many different methods can be used fruitfully in critical realist empirical research (for example, Edwards, O'Mahoney, and Vincent 2014 covers a wide range of methods).

Realist critique

Bhaskar's project was always intensely critical. He saw his work as striving to "*underlabour*… for the sciences, and especially the human sciences, in so far as they might illuminate and empower the project of human self-emancipation" (Bhaskar 1989: vii). He made several attempts to provide rigorous grounds for an ethical critique and a positive project of emancipation, although his work was oriented to how we might justify these from a philosophical perspective rather than on specific political critiques or projects. Indeed, it is arguable that it was his desire to provide stronger grounds for critique that drove the development of his work through multiple stages, which he always presented as building on and transforming, rather than replacing or invalidating, his earlier work.

In his early work, he suggests that social science's critical potential arises from what he calls *emancipatory critiques.* He argues that when we are able to identify false beliefs, we can automatically proceed to condemn the sources of those false beliefs and to justify action aimed at their removal (Bhaskar 1986: 177). In, particular, he argues that when social structures produce false beliefs about themselves (as notably argued in Marxist ideology

critique) this means that we are justified in removing them. Thus, he argues for a strong ethical naturalism: that we can proceed directly from a factual claim to a normative conclusion. In his dialectical phase he extends this argument further to argue that if we can show that some structure leads to a failure to meet human needs then we can automatically proceed to justify action aimed at its removal (Bhaskar 1993b: 262). Again, he claims that this is a straight derivation of an ethical conclusion from a purely factual premise, but he also goes beyond this to assert a commitment to moral realism: the reality of objective values (Bhaskar 1993b: 211). In what is sometimes known as the spiritual phase of his work, organised around the concept of *metareality*, Bhaskar offers a new argument to justify his moral realism. Metareality is a level beyond or behind ordinary reality, while ordinary reality is a kind of imperfect shadow of metareality. In a sense, metareality is the common potential from which the various different forms of ordinary reality, including values, emerge, and he sees it as providing a kind of connecting commonality between all ordinary forms of being which he calls *co-presence* (Morgan 2003: 125). Bhaskar claims that humans have access to co-presence through techniques like meditation which attune us to our *ground state* and orient us to love, reciprocity and right action.

Not all critical realists are convinced by the various grounds for critique identified by Bhaskar (Elder-Vass 2010b; Morgan 2003), but critical realists typically follow Bhaskar in the looser sense of adopting a critical perspective driven by an explicit desire for human flourishing. Influenced by the feminist tradition of the ethics of care, Sayer has criticised a tendency he finds in critical social science generally, but also in accounts like Bhaskar's, to detach critique from its normative roots. Indeed he accuses critical realism of giving "a complacent account of CSS [critical social science] in which ought follows straightforwardly from is" (Sayer 1997: 473). Instead, he argues, we need to recognise that critique always depends on normative judgements, and the tendency of critical social science to conceal the judgements underlying its critiques undermines the force of those critiques and indeed the critics' own understanding of their critical standpoints. He is critical, for example, of Foucault's crypto-normativity (a term from Habermas) which provides vaguely dystopian accounts of the social world while avoiding explicit judgements about just what is good and bad about the situation being described (Sayer 2012: 190). Rejecting the sceptical tendency to dismiss all value talk as naïve, Sayer argues that critique is necessarily based on moral values. He recognises that "moral values are cultural values" but rejects the relativist conclusion that they are "totally culture-bound", on the grounds that "they are influenced by

trans-cultural needs and capacities for suffering and flourishing" (Sayer 2000b: 82). This is a weak ethical naturalism in which moral values are driven by the nature of human needs and capacities but those needs are recognised as being culturally mediated and, in some cases, entirely culturally produced. Critique must therefore be based in an engagement with how people experience their lives and with what matters to them. Sayer provides a brilliant exemplar in his own critique of wealth in contemporary society (Sayer 2015).

Debates

Critical realism has been criticised on a range of grounds. Perhaps the commonest disagreements relate to its defence of the causal powers of social structures. Rom Harré, for example, despite having been Bhaskar's PhD supervisor and one inspiration of his work on causal powers, has rejected its application to social structures. Harré argues that only "powerful particulars" can have causal powers and denies that social structures can be particulars – indeed he argues that in the social realm only individual people are powerful particulars, who operate on the social world through their discursive acts (Harré 2002). As Bob Carter has argued in response, however, Harré's argument rests on seeing social structures as only rules, customs and conventions and ignoring the structures that emerge as a result of relations within groups of people (Carter 2002).

In sociology, Anthony King has criticised Archer's work on social structure, on the grounds that her invocation of temporality does not entail that structures have power: historical social residues need not be structural (King 1999). We can concede King's point, however, without losing the argument for social structure since critical realists, including Archer, also see social structure as synchronically emergent: as having powers in the present that depend on their composition in the present but could not be possessed by their parts if they were not organised into such structures(Elder-Vass 2007).

Another theme in criticisms of critical realism, from a loosely Popperian perspective, has been to question its commitment to fallibilism. Justin Cruickshank takes the view that while he is fallibilist about empirical and scientific knowledge, Bhaskar claims a special status for his ontological arguments, seeing them as derived *a priori* and thus impregnable to error (Cruickshank 2004). Cruickshank's argument, however, cannot be sustained. Perhaps Bhaskar's wording is a little loose in places, but when he addresses these questions explicitly, he is categorical: "all cognitive claims, including claims to knowledge of necessities in any

mode (whether logical, mathematical, transcendental, conceptual, natural, conventional, psychological, historical, etc.) are fallible" (Bhaskar 1986: 15). Stephen Kemp offers a related argument, suggesting that while critical realists may be nominally committed to fallibilism, they are not willing enough to challenge their own assumptions and conclusions. He advocates what he calls *transformational fallibilism*, which sees the questioning of knowledge claims, even those that are apparently successful, as vital to ensuring the progress of knowledge (Kemp 2017). Critical realism is thus found wanting, not because it rejects fallibilism in principle, but because it fails to challenge itself thoroughly enough.

One must question, however, whether any progressive research programme could proceed in this way. This is not to say that successful programmes should insist on their conclusions being unquestionably correct. The predominant orientation of critical realism is a happy medium between these two extremes, in which well supported conclusions are respected and built upon, unless and until good reasons emerge to doubt them, and less well supported conclusions are questioned and criticised constructively with a view to replacing them. A healthy research tradition, in other words, needs internal debate, and there is plenty of evidence of this in critical realism. In addition to questions of the basis of critique and the nature of agency referred to earlier, one could also mention the debate between Archer and Elder-Vass on the nature of culture (Archer and Elder-Vass 2012). The most conclusive evidence, however, that critical realism remains suitably critical of its own outputs is that many critical realists remain dubious about the value of the later phases of Bhaskar's work. The dialectical phase has been widely questioned, and the turn to metareality widely rejected, amongst critical realists as well as outsiders. Indeed, the most significant challenges to critical realist orthodoxy have been mounted from inside the tradition.

Conclusion

Although it is primarily a philosophical perspective, critical realism is increasingly being employed as a framework for both empirical and theoretical work across a wide range of social science disciplines and fields. It combines a coherent understanding of causality as the interaction of multiple causal mechanisms with a recognition of the concept dependence of social structures. As a result, it shows how we can combine explanatory and interpretive work and thus overcome the central methodological divide in the methodology of the social sciences.

References

Archer, M.S. (1995) *Realist Social Theory: The Morphogenetic Approach*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Archer, M.S. (2000) *Being Human*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Archer, M.S. (2003) *Structure, Agency, and the Internal Conversation*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Archer, M.S. and D. Elder-Vass (2012) 'Cultural System or Norm Circles? An Exchange', *European Journal of Social Theory* 15(1) 93–115.

Bhaskar, R. (1975) *A Realist Theory of Science*, Leeds: Leeds Books.

Bhaskar, R. (1979) *The Possibility of Naturalism*, Brighton: Harvester.

Bhaskar, R. (1986) *Scientific Realism and Human Emancipation*, London: Verso.

Bhaskar, R. (1989) *Reclaiming Reality: A Critical Introduction to Contemporary Philosophy*, London: Verso.

Bhaskar, R. (1993a) 'Afterword', pp. 185–7 in Shotter, J. (ed.), *Conversational Realities*, London: Sage.

Bhaskar, R. (1993b) *Dialectic: The Pulse of Freedom*, London: Verso.

Bhaskar, R. (2016) *Enlightened Common Sense: The Philosophy of Critical Realism*, (M. Hartwig, ed.), New York: Routledge.

Carter, B. (2002) 'People Power: Harre and the Myth of Social Structure', *European Journal of Social Theory* 5(1) 134–42.

Cruickshank, J. (2004) 'A Tale of Two Ontologies: An Immanent Critique of Critical Realism', *Sociological Review* 52(4) 567–85.

Edwards, P.K., J. O'Mahoney, and S. Vincent (2014) *Studying Organizations Using Critical Realism: A Practical Guide*, Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Elder-Vass, D. (2007) 'For Emergence: Refining Archer's Account of Social Structure', *Journal for the Theory of Social Behaviour* 37(1) 25–44.

Elder-Vass, D. (2010a) *The Causal Power of Social Structures*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Elder-Vass, D. (2010b) 'Realist Critique without Ethical Naturalism or Moral Realism', *Journal of Critical Realism* 9(1) 33–58.

Elder-Vass, D. (2012) *The Reality of Social Construction*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Harré, R. (2002) ‘Social Reality and the Myth of Social Structure’, *European Journal of Social Theory* 5(1) 111–23.

Kemp, S. (2017) ‘Transformational Fallibilism and the Development of Understanding’, *Social Epistemology* 31(2) 192–209.

King, A. (1999) ‘Against Structure: A Critique of Morphogenetic Social Theory’, *Sociological Review* 47(2) 199–227.

Lawson, T. (1997) *Economics and Reality*, London: Routledge.

Lawson, T. (2019) *The Nature of Social Reality: Issues in Social Ontology*, Abingdon: Routledge.

Morgan, J. (2003) ‘What Is Meta-Reality?’, *Journal of Critical Realism* 1(2) 115–46.

Porpora, D.V. (2015) *Reconstructing Sociology*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Sayer, A. (1997) ‘Critical Realism and the Limits to Critical Social Science’, *Journal for the Theory of Social Behaviour* 27(4) 473–88.

Sayer, A. (2000a) *Realism and Social Science*, London: Sage.

Sayer, A. (2000b) ‘Moral Economy and Political Economy’, *Studies in Political Economy* 61(1) 79–103.

Sayer, A. (2009) ‘Reflexivity and the Habitus’, pp. 108–22 in Archer, M.S. (ed.), *Conversations About Reflexivity*, Abingdon: Routledge.

Sayer, A. (2012) ‘Power, Causality and Normativity: A Critical Realist Critique of Foucault’, *Journal of Political Power* 5(2) 179–94.

Sayer, A. (2015) *Why We Can’t Afford the Rich*, Bristol: Policy Press.

Smith, C. (2010) *What Is a Person?*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press.