

Critical Realism Symposium—Centre for Peace Studies (30-31 May 2005)

Transcending Conventional Boundaries: Contemporary Challenges for Social Science and World Peace

Nordic Critical Realist Peace Research Network (NCRPRN)
Nordic Network for Critical Realism and Interdisciplinary Research (NNCRIR)

We are delighted to bring together critical realists—as well as others who are interested in critical realism—from a diverse range of disciplines. We hope everyone will enjoy the stimulating intellectual exchange this gathering should make possible. The format will be very informal and all are welcome to attend and participate in any or all of the scheduled sessions.

Programme

PART ONE: FORMS OF SOCIAL INQUIRY

Monday

11:00-11:30	Reception	
11:30-1300	Keynote 1	R. Bhaskar and B. Danermark, <i>Interdisciplinarity & Critical Realism</i>
13:45-14:30	Session 1	T. Skinningsrud, <i>Is Historical-Sociological Research Interdisciplinary?</i>
14:30-15:15	Session 2	P.S. Robinson, <i>History, Political Theory & 'Constructed' Social Divides</i>

Tuesday

08:30-09:15	Session 3	<i>Open Forum: Approaching Interdisciplinarity</i>
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PART TWO: SOCIAL INQUIRY AND ITS CRITICAL CONTENT

09:15-10:45	Keynote 2	R. Bhaskar, <i>Intersubjectivity & Peace</i>
10:45-11:00	Coffee	
11:00-11:45	Session 4	P. Næss, <i>Prediction, Regressions & Critical Realism</i>
11:45-12:45	Session 5	<i>Open Forum: Critical Realism, Social Science & World Peace</i>

Background

Critical Realism

The basic tenet of philosophical realism is that reality exists independently of our knowledge of it. Critical realist theory, inspired especially by the work of Roy Bhaskar ([1975] 1997), does not claim to represent absolute truth through direct access to reality, however. On the contrary, realist social theory bases itself on the premise that all data are theory dependent and reality can only be known under a particular description. Since we have no direct access to reality, we can have no absolute knowledge of it. Though our knowledge is fallible and so can always be corrected, it is nevertheless possible to distinguish theories' *relative* explanatory power. Bhaskar (2002) suggests that the essence of critical realism lies in the combination of *ontological realism*, *epistemic relativism* and *judgemental rationalism*. Implicitly or explicitly, ontology regulates the basic conceptualisations of all social theory, since ontological assumptions determine which entities we investigate. Invariably, those who explicitly

declare that they do not ground their social theory in ontological conceptions do so nonetheless implicitly (Bhaskar [1978] 1998, Archer 1995, 2003).

References

- Archer, M.S. (1995) *Realist Social Science: The Morphogenetic Approach*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
 ----- (2003) *Structure, Agency and the Internal Conversation*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
 Bhaskar, R. ([1975] 1997) *A Realist Theory of Science*, London: Routledge.
 ----- ([1978] 1998) *The Possibility of Naturalism*, London: Routledge.
 ----- (2002) *From Science to Emancipation*, New Delhi/Thousand Oaks/London: Sage Publications.

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The aim is to coordinate and build collaborations (including student projects) around existing research projects and programmes in Norway, Sweden, Finland, Denmark and Iceland. These are connected, first, on a meta-theoretical level of shared ontological and epistemological premises, which shape the construction of theory and the relationship between theory and empirical inquiry. The projects and programmes are also connected by an interest in generating social theory per se, but especially theory of relevance to a normative concern with emancipation, understood as the elimination of oppression and the instantiation of peace, broadly conceived.

NNCRIR

In the Nordic countries interdisciplinary research is generally not a subject for special research training and very few courses are taught on how to do it, or indeed why it is vitally important in today's world. Given this gap between the existing status of research training and the needed level of research training and comprehension, we argue that creating a network dedicated to interdisciplinary work is an innovation greatly needed. This requires, first, a framework for researchers to work together more closely to start linking disciplines, and, second, a comprehensive philosophical perspective for actively seeking to put emergent and successful interdisciplinary ideas into research practice.

We argue that "critical realism" is well suited to this purpose and the overall aim of the network is to establish a permanent Nordic Network of Critical Realism focusing on and supporting interdisciplinary applied research. Within the network new methodologies based on critical realism will be further developed and applied. Among the planned activities are: doctoral courses, workshops, special thematic seminars, conferences, international guest researchers, a website, a newsletter and a Nordic Journal of Critical Realism. Nine research groups from all the Nordic countries will constitute the core of the Network, and the Network will be open to all who are interested in interdisciplinary research.