

Ethics and emancipation in action: Towards concrete utopia

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Presenter/s: Carl Auerbach
Organisation: Yeshiva University

Democracy is a system for processing conflict between individuals with diverse interests so that they can make collective decisions about policy. It is often conceptualized as a social contract between its citizens. This presentation investigates the conditions under which the democratic social contract is “good enough” for citizens to be willing to abide by its rules and laws, even though they strongly disagree with particular decisions. It analyzes the democratic social contract as a layered system with three levels: the political/institutional, the social/interactional, and the psychological/intrapsychic.

At the political/institutional level the ideal democratic social contract creates a framework in which citizens have equal input to collective decisions and all citizens agree to abide by them. It will be “good enough” when citizens agree that there is more to be gained by managing their conflicts within the system rather than by operating outside of it. This agreement is often problematic, for reasons at the social/interactional and psychological/intrapsychic levels.

At the social/interactional level individuals will experience the democratic social contract as good enough when they possess a common identity as citizens that supersedes their partisan identities and antagonism. Ingroup/outgroup dynamics, particularly ingroup favoritism and outgroup devaluation make a common identity as citizen difficult to achieve. The presentation analyzes factors that influence ingroup/outgroup dynamics including ideology-based narrative identity, leader/follower dynamics, group realities and group emotions.

At the psychological/intrapsychic level accepting the democratic social contract as good enough requires that individuals be capable of modulating their aggression and narcissism so that they can stay connected and related. The presentation analyzes this capacity in terms of the concepts of good enough parenting and going on being (Winnicott), containment (Bion), the depressive position (Klein), mutuality and thirdness (Benjamin), and lack (Lacan).

Predecessors of Dialectical Critical Realist Ethics: Notions of the Good Life and Eudaimonia in Ancient Greek Philosophy

Presenter/s: Onur Özmen

Organisation: University College London

In this paper I follow the traces of a special affinity between some particular themes in the ethics of critical realism and ancient Greek thought, and take up the question of how they can be pursued for helping critical realism participate in contemporary debates in moral philosophy.

In Plato's dialogues, we have Socrates argue for the equivalence of the good life and the happy life; from Aristotle comes a more nuanced theory of the cultivation of virtues conceptualized as dispositions to act in certain ways under certain circumstances, underlining the role of practice; and with the Stoics, who see the historical Socrates as a model, we arrive at a more radical emphasis on the significance of these dispositions for flourishing, to the extent that they are not only necessary for achieving happiness, as is the case for Aristotle, but also sufficient for it. All these three approaches of ancient Greek philosophy are based on different forms moral realism and ethical naturalism, two metaethical positions Roy Bhaskar clearly, but without much elaboration, states that he holds.

I analyse the specific ways critical realism utilizes the ancient Greek concepts of *phronesis* (practical wisdom), *sophrosyne* (temperance or balance) and *eudaimonia* (happiness or human flourishing). I discuss how the 'eudaimonian ethics' and 'philosophy as a way of life' traditions can serve as 'great predecessors' for a dialectical critical realist ethics, and try to show why they provide a fertile ground for developing the latter.

Presenter/s: Antonis Ragkousis

Organisation: King's College London

Abstract

The relationship between social ontology and ethics is a matter which deserves further investigation. In this paper, Critical Ethical Naturalism (CEN) as advanced by Tony Lawson and the Cambridge Social Ontology Group (CSOG), is used as a prototypical example of an approach to ethics which is informed by systematic and explicit social ontological theorising. CEN has received less attention than other aspects of CSOG and Lawson's work. This isn't surprising since the most sustained account of CEN appeared in print only in 2015 and even there the theory is briefly presented and not fully located in relation to competing contemporary and historical ethical theories. While explicable this relative neglect is unfortunate. CEN arises out of Lawson's broader social ontological theorising and it is a distinctive ethical theory deserving further elaboration, attention and comparative evaluation due to its capacity to operate as a conceptual aide towards emancipatory action. Moreover, an appreciation of key elements of CEN can facilitate a better understanding of the broader project of Cambridge Social Ontology. More specifically, Lawson's discussion of strategies for advancing human emancipation and progressive social change, including the notion of communities of care (*eudaimonic bubbles*), can only be fully understood in the context of CEN. I argue that the significance and distinctiveness of CEN lies both in its foregrounding of ontology and its representing a form of modern Aristotelianism in ethics. Lawson himself points to the Aristotelian heritage of his ethical theory but doesn't elaborate sufficiently. The argument advanced is that central elements of CEN, such as ontological insights pertaining to the intrinsically social-relational constitution of humans, can be better appreciated and further developed once the resonances with themes in Aristotle's writings are fully elaborated upon. It is on such grounds that CEN is presented as a viable alternative to contemporary normative moral theories.

The "Pedagogy of Secularization" Origins and the Morphogenesis of Italian Society in the Second half of the Twentieth Century

Presenter/s: Roberto Francesco Scalon

Organisation: University of Turin

The paper attempts to articulate in the sociological categories of critical realism a topic which, by its very nature, is typically placed in the philosophical-political and historical-political spheres. It starts from the Italian debate of the Seventies concerning the process of deep cultural transformation of the country. The theme is of great interest not only from a historical point of view, but above all for its relevance today. The current Italian cultural situation, in fact, constitutes the morphogenetic outcome of that process, which was described by the Italian philosopher Augusto Del Noce as "pedagogy of secularization". This concept is the nerve center of our reflection. To understand its meaning, it is necessary to consider, firstly, the configuration of each of the three forces that dominated the cultural, and therefore also ethical-political, scenario in post-World War II Italy - that is, the catholic, the secular and the communist - as well as, secondly, the relations between them. In a scenario in which the Catholic movement occupied a position of undoubted pre-eminence both in the political economic and in the social field, how was it possible that, on the cultural level, the country that symbolizes Catholicism has been invested by an unstoppable and omnipervasive process of secularization? According to Del Noce, the reasons must be sought in two directions. In the first place, looking to the West, we must consider the nature of the main line of development undertaken by the philosophical path of modernity (from Descartes to Hegel and then to Nietzsche, having in Marx the crucial moment) as well as its inevitable consequences on the spiritual and ethical-political level. Secondly, we must consider the specific Italian situation and, in particular, the experience of fascism and the way in which the currents of Italian neo idealism and Catholic thought reacted to it.

A Necessary Alliance: Knowledge Production and Popular Protagonism. A Popular Power Perspective from Latin America

Presenter/s: Sebastián Link Chaparro, Andrés Marconi Vargas

Organisation: Johns Hopkins University

We are in a phase of a generalized crisis of capitalism. The new configurations of core powers in the world-system intensify imperialist disputes, reconfiguring the relations between money and military power. Operating and rooted in historically elitized social fields organically integrated with the division of labor of the ruling classes, how can the production of scientific knowledge become an organic part of anti-capitalist emancipatory forces able to overcome the crisis?

CR offers key orientations to navigate academia, hegemonized by positivism and postmodernism. It offers a realist approach of exploitation and oppression without reducing them to data fetishism and its technocratic and scientificist correlate, nor to a problem of interpretations and identities. Nevertheless, CR has difficulties informing emancipation if it does not *ground* knowledge production in the interests of the *popular classes* (the classes excluded from academia). Drawing on the orientations of Bambirra, Marini, Rodney, and the Chilean Movement of Revolutionary Left, we reflect on how embedding knowledge production in the *internal forces of development* of the *popular movement* starting from the *bourgeois-led* academic field.

We discuss three challenges coming from the popular power tradition. First, the need of theoretical labor contributing to the connection between the popular power strategy and the operations of the capitalist world-system. Second, strategizing knowledge production based on a class analysis informing the *territoriality of knowledge production* (e.g., university, think tank) and its relationship with the class struggle, incentivizing people-people relations without bourgeois mediation. Finally, we build on the concepts of *strategic autonomy* and *groundings* for describing the double challenge of autonomy from bourgeois forces and relocation in the *popular movement*. Based on these three orientations, we pretend to contribute to alternatives to the strategic outlook of *real utopias*, *undercommons*, *public sociology*, and *outsider within*, bringing back the insurrectional traditions of Marx and Lenin.

Mobilizing emancipatory agency for managing the commons: A co-engaged ethico-political depth enquiry in natural resource management commoning activity

Presenter/s: Heila Lotz-Sisitka, Reuben Thifhulufhelwi, Charles Chikunda, Maletje Mponwana, Derick du Toit

Organisation: Rhodes University and AWARD, South Africa

Abstract:

In South Africa, poverty and marginalisation intersect with lack of access to, and ownership of land and natural resources. Catalysing land restitution movement in contemporary South Africa, is the formation of Common Property Associations (CPAs), an intentional emancipatory policy tool conceptualised to redress histories of colonialism and apartheid land dispossession. Land restitution is a politically infused, complex runaway object with many intersecting ethical-political dynamics and contradictions that hover and move in and across time, space, community, cultural, generational, professional and political boundaries.

We describe how we worked formatively with heterogeneous activity systems (Engeström & Sannino, 2020) involved in CPA formation (land claimants, government officials, NGOs). We empirically show how livelihood and social justice interests in land restitution amongst historically disenfranchised communities fuelled depth explanatory rationality and investigation (or depth-inquiry – D-I) that includes geo-historical directional rationality oriented towards the common good, inter-generational solidarity and ethical-political transformative praxis. Bhaskar (2009) argues that emancipatory forms of agency are stronger when situated in the latter forms of depth explanatory rationality, with such forms of D-I being central to emancipatory agency as “What constitutes an agent’s wellbeing cannot be stipulated a priori, but must itself be discovered in relation to the agent’s antecedent notion of her wellbeing in the course of the explanatory critique and emancipatory practice such as D-I presupposes”.

We describe how the co-engaged D-I’s emergent in formative interventions in heterogenous activity coalitions involved with CPA formation, as contradictions in land restitution processes led to the co-production of iteratively related double stimulation tools over six years (Engeström & Sannino, 2010). Emancipatory empowerment emerged in these iteratively mediated co-engaged D-I processes, as ethical and political expansion of a cultural historical boundary crossing political object that is involving motive, mediation and mobility in and across time, space, community, and intergenerational boundaries and histories.

Ethics and emancipation in human agency - the perspective of critical realism

Presenter/s: Monika Bukowska & Professor Wielecki

Organisation: Cardinal Stefan Wyszyński University

The idea of ethics and emancipation seems essential, not only in philosophy, but also in sociology. In my opinion the key is the position of critical realism. In analysing the contemporary problems that we face, we need to enhance an idea of the good and how to achieve it through human agency; and only the work of Roy Bhaskar currently provides a way to do this. In particular, the critical realist concept of reflexivity is especially important and therefore, in this paper, I offer a comprehensive account of the views of Margaret Archer on reflexivity. A special kind of reflexivity in Archer's typology, which is of great importance for humanity, is metareflexivity. Metareflexivity usually takes the standard form of asking questions and giving answers, as part of an internal conversation. Within the framework of metareflexivity, a person reflects on his own actions, and at the same time tries to relate them to the general canon of objective values, often conceived in an idealistic way. Therefore, metareflexivity most often refers to social values and people's involvement in various civic initiatives. In Archer's conception, metareflexivity is related to what Douglas Porpora calls moral purpose. Humans are not content with traditional values, but strive to realize higher ideals. Hence, much of people's metareflexive thinking is about what actions should be taken to be able to make changes in the social world, so as to make the world a more sustainable and caring place.