

Roy Bhaskar (1944–2014)

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Ram Bhaskar, generally known as Roy, died on 19 November 2014, of heart failure. He was the chief architect of the philosophy critical realism, which ‘underlabours’ for critical realist social theory and science.

Roy was born in London on 15 May 1944. He was educated at St Paul’s School in London before going to Oxford to study philosophy, politics and economics at Balliol College (1963–1966), where he got a first. He continued in Oxford as a lecturer in economics at Pembroke College (1967–1973) and a research fellow in philosophy at Linacre College (1971–1973) before moving to the University of Edinburgh as a lecturer in philosophy (1973–1982). Roy then withdrew from full-time academic work in order to concentrate on his writing and promote his philosophy, although he continued to take up temporary teaching positions in Oxford, elsewhere in the UK and increasingly in Scandinavia. From 2007, he was a part-time professorial world scholar at the Institute of Education, University of London.

As a postgraduate at Oxford, Roy switched from economics to philosophy because he found that mainstream economics had little of value to say about real-world problems and he wanted to understand the deeper philosophical roots of this. He held, like Rousseau, that people as such are free but everywhere in chains. His philosophical project was universal human emancipation, subject to ‘the highest norm of all, fundamental truth’. His main method was a realist version of Kant’s transcendental method, combined with immanent critique. This put him very much at odds with then-fashionable linguistic philosophy and postmodernism, so that his first book, *A Realist Theory of Science* (1975) – now a classic – was rejected when he submitted it for a DPhil at Oxford in 1974. His philosophy of social science was elaborated in *The Possibility of Naturalism: A Philosophical Critique of the Contemporary Social Sciences* (1979) and *Scientific Realism and Human Emancipation* (1986). These works are the main philosophical texts of what came to be known as original critical realism. Roy went on to develop this philosophy in two further stages known as dialectical critical realism and metaRealism, where the key works are *Dialectic: The Pulse of Freedom* (1993) and *The Philosophy of MetaReality: Creativity, Love and Freedom* (2002). The first of these moves beyond previous dialectics in order to arrive at an adequate account of absence (negativity) and so of change, while the second articulates a spirituality ‘consistent with all faiths and no faith’ which, Roy argues, is already pervasive, although largely unrecognised, in everyday life and affords a rich basis for the contingent development of a global society based on love, in which ‘the free flourishing of each is a condition of the free flourishing of all’.

Three calamities befell Roy early in the new millennium. He developed a neuropathy that led to amputation of a foot and ongoing struggle with infection. He was defrauded

of most of the capital he had accumulated over the years by trading up in the London housing market. And then, when he really needed it, he could not get a full-time academic job and so spent his last 12 years struggling to make ends meet. This in my view is the price he paid above all for the dialectical and spiritual turns, which were widely greeted with alienated hostility and orientalist talk of gurus and cults. They are arguably in reality far ahead of their time and will in due course come to be ranked, in terms of their creativity and profundity, with original critical realism – itself only now, with the recent ‘returns’ to metaphysics and ontology, starting to be widely appreciated in philosophy (in contrast to social theory and science, where its influence has been longstanding and is rapidly gathering pace). Having escaped the fate of professionalisation into ‘normal’ philosophy, this extraordinarily gifted and intrepid thinker exploded one profoundly entrenched taboo in the Western academy after another – taboos on ontology, explanatory critique, real absence, internal relationality, human transformative praxis, spirituality, enchantment and nonduality – and remedied these absences in richer, more adequate conceptual formations.

Throughout the ordeals of his later years, Roy continued his exuberant struggle to win the intellectual high ground for a genuinely free global society and was greatly appreciated and loved by all who knew him well for his cheerfulness, his generosity, his warmth and inclusiveness, his talent for making people feel very special and give their best and above all for his gentleness and his love. He had two wonderful carers and partners in Cheryl Frank, who died of cancer in 2010, and Rebecca Long, who survives him, as does his wife and close friend Hilary Wainwright and brother Krishan.

Mervyn Hartwig
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