This Sorrowful Song

A Genealogy and Ethics of Critical Realism

by

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Preface

The title of this book is taken from the words of Henryk Górecki's third symphony called *the Symphony of Sorrowful Songs* (in polish: *Symfonia pieśni żałosnych*). This sung work, No. 3, Op 36, is a symphony in three movements.[1] A solo soprano sings a lamentation in Polish in each of the three movements. The first is a 15th-century Polish lament of Mary, mother of Jesus; the second a message written on the wall of a Gestapo cell during World War II; and the third a Silesian folk song of a mother searching for her son killed by the Germans in the Silesian uprisings. The first and third movements are written from the perspective of a parent who has lost a child, and the second movement from that of a child separated from a parent. The dominant themes of the symphony are motherhood, despair and suffering. In 1973, Górecki approached the Polish folklorist, Adolf Dygacz, in search of traditional melodies to incorporate in a new work. Dygacz obliged with four songs which had been recorded in the Silesia region in south-western Poland. Górecki was impressed by the melody: 'Where has he gone, my dear young son?' (*Kajże się podział mój synocek miły?*), which describes a mother's mourning for a son lost in war, and probably dates from the Silesian uprisings of 1919-21[2].

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[1]Sources: Alison Moore, 'Is the Unspeakable Singable?', Henryk Górecki's Symphony of Sorrowful Songs and the Ethics of Holocaust Empathy, *Journal of Multidisciplinary International Studies*, 8 (1), January 2011, 1-17; Luke Howard (1998) 'Motherhood, Billboard, and the Holocaust: Perceptions and Receptions of Górecki's Symphony No. 3', *The Musical Quarterly*, 82 (1): 131-159; Adrian Thomas (1997) *Górecki*: *Oxford Studies of Composers*, Oxford: Clarendon Press.

[2] The first Silesian Uprising in 1919 was a series of armed revolts by Polish populations in Upper Silesia against German rule. The German military quickly suppressed the initial revolt, but the tensions and uprisings continued in 1920 (the second Silesian Uprising) and 1921 (the third Silesian Uprising).

Later that year, Górecki learned of an inscription scrawled on the wall of a cell in a German Gestapo prison in the town of Zakopane, which lies at the foot of the Tatra Mountains in southern Poland. The words were those of 18-year-old, Helena Wanda Blażusiakówna, a highland woman incarcerated on 25 September, 1944. It read *O Mamo, nie płacz, nie. Niebios Przeczysta Królowo, Ty zawsze wspieraj mnie* (Oh Mamma do not cry, no. Immaculate Queen of Heaven, always support me). Górecki explained that, 'I have to admit that I have always been irritated by grand words, by calls for revenge. Perhaps in the face of death I would shout out in this way. But the sentence I found is different, almost an apology or explanation for having got herself into such trouble; she is seeking comfort and support in simple, short but meaningful words'. He explained further that, 'in prison, the whole wall was covered with inscriptions screaming out loud: 'I'm innocent', 'Murderers', 'Executioners', 'Free me', 'You have to save me' – it was all so loud, so banal. Adults were writing this, while here it is an eighteen-year-old girl, almost a child. And she is so different. She does not despair, does not cry, does not scream for revenge. She does not think about herself; whether she deserves her fate or not. Instead, she only thinks about her mother: because it is her mother who will experience true despair. This inscription was something extra-ordinary. And it really fascinated me'.

Górecki now had two songs: one from a mother to her son, the other from a daughter to her mother. While looking for a third that would continue the theme, he decided on a mid-15th century folk song from the southern city of Opole. It contains a passage in which the Virgin Mary speaks to her son dying on the cross: 'O my son, beloved and chosen, share your wounds with your mother ....' (*Synku miły i wybrany, rozdziel z matką swoje rany* ....). Górecki explained that, 'this text was folk-like, anonymous. So now I had three acts, three persons .... Originally, I wanted to frame these texts with an

introduction and a conclusion. I even chose two verses (5 and 6) from Psalm 93/94 in the translation by Wujek: 'They humiliated your people, O Lord, and afflicted your heritage, they killed the widow and the passer-by, murdered the orphans.' However, he rejected this format because he believed the structure would position the work as a symphony about war. Górecki sought to transcend such particularities, and instead structured the work as three independent laments.

This book, *This Sorrowful Song: A Genealogy and Ethics of Critical Realism*, focuses on the origins, interconnections and uses of the seminal concepts in social theory of critical realism and ethics. In trying to understand how a concept or a set of concepts functions in the world, it is important to contextualise the way it functions within three networks or constellations of meaning: antecedent frameworks, contemporaneous frameworks and pragmatic frameworks. This book will be constructed round these three frameworks, as any text about an idea – ethics – or a conceptual tradition – critical realism – should be. The book will trace the genealogy of the term, critical realism, through the work of Roy Wood Sellars, Ludwig Wittgenstein, Wilfred Sellars, Richard Rorty, Roy Bhaskar and Robert Brandom. It will set out a theory of critical realism (its genealogical, semantic, ethical and pragmatic elements) that pays due deference to these six seminal theorists, contextualising this theory as a replacement for and alternative to empiricism, although these six theorists would not subscribe completely to the five commitments that I believe constitute a critical realist philosophy: a mind-independent reality, an apperceptive and transformative process of world-to-mind and mind-to-world relations, a critical view of knowledge, a post-empiricist ontology and a normative epistemology.

The route that I have chosen to take in my search for an account and picture of critical realism is perhaps idiosyncratic. This is *from* Roy Wood Sellars *to* Ludwig Wittgenstein *to* Wilfred Sellars *to* Richard Rorty *to* Roy Bhaskar and *then to* Robert Brandom. This is not a route that gets its meaning from the one influencing the other or further developments of the ideas directly below them in the chain. It is not a route based solely on a timeline, of births and deaths, or of publications, or of the influence of their ideas, although in any genealogy of ideas this clearly has some importance. It is certainly not a temporal route comprising my various encounters, initial or otherwise, with these various philosophers. Rather, it is an order of ideas that I have imposed on the material, resulting in a critical realist genealogy that I am satisfied with.

David Scott
2025

Chapter 1
Critical Realism – An Introduction

My principal concern in this book is to give some meaning to the phrase, critical realism, and to do this through a genealogy of the concept. Critical realism is a conceptual configuration in the realm of language, and, as a set of words, it has some metaphysical properties. Because it is a languaged concept it can be said to be polysemic, semantically contested, networked, interactive, powerful and dynamic. In addition, as an object it has causal powers, both as a conceptual object and also because it is in the world, or at least in a world. The focus of this book then, is on the concepts of realism and criticality (much more on this last in chapter 9) and the relations between the two. I begin in this chapter with the first of these, the notion of realism, and note initially that there are many varieties: aesthetic realism, agential realism, conceptual realism, critical realism, dialectical realism, representational realism, epistemological realism, logical realism, semantic realism, metaphysical realism, moral realism, transcendental realism, perspectival realism, realistic rationalism, scientific realism, and many more.

This raises the issue of what realism is, its content and its form. Although it would be possible to accept (or reject) realism in full, it is more common for theorists to be realist or non-realist about particular areas of life, such as objects in the world or ethical values. In addition, it is misleading to think that there is a single and unequivocal judgement that can be made with regards to objects in the world – we can be more or less realist about a particular object. There are many different forms that realism can take, and this book is an attempt at giving a set of meanings to one of them, critical realism, whilst at the

same time accepting that in the language domain, meanings can be derived genealogically, coextensively and pragmatically. In like fashion we can understand non-realism in these three ways and in part as a direct opposition to a composite notion of realism. In this sense a non-realist signifier can be attached to any statement about world-to-mind and mind-to-world relations which does not acknowledge the existence of mind-independent and minds-independent objects.

We can, in the first instance then, make two general claims about realism and realist configurations: that an object exists and that it is mind-independent. And from this we can suggest that an object can only be real if it has some form of existence and that it operates externally to a mind or many minds. The fact that the moon exists and is an oblate spheroid is independent of anything anyone happens to say or think about the matter. The realist wants to make the commonplace claim that everyday objects and their properties are not dependent on anyone's linguistic practices, conceptual schemes, recollections, meditations or whatever. And in addition, to call an object mind-independent or real, in this sense, is to say, as John Mackie (1977) did, that it can be an object of knowledge, that it can be perceived, that it can be recognised, that it is prior to and independent of our preferences and choices, that it is not constituted by our choosing or deciding to think in a certain way, and so on.[1]

We intuitively know that the world exists independently of our lives and socio-cultural practices, including the practices of knowing and coming to know. We feel that the world is real, that it exists around us, out there, indifferent to our hopes, beliefs and desires at any particular moment. This independent, objective, world is the

[1]'There are no objective values', Mackie, J. (1990), *Ethics*, Oxford: Blackwells: p.13.

yardstick against which we measure our beliefs and convictions, in order to assess and establish their truth and reality. The nature of this independent world is something about which we can make discoveries through learning, and our knowledge increases with every discovery. The independent existence of the world and the way we have unmediated access to it is the essence of the view of objectivity shared by common sense, science and technical-rationality. Truth is achieved through applying appropriate rationally grounded techniques. Once a statement about the world is found to be true, it is true absolutely for everyone anywhere. For any field of understanding, there will be one true description of the world, and this description must command universal assent, since once a truth is established it is unassailable; it has a cognitive authority which makes it irrational not to assent to it.

In direct forms of realism, the relation between theories that explain the world and the world itself has to be understood on the model of the external perspective, the God's-eye point of view. We come to know about the world but without being in it. The world consists of independently existing objects of which there can only be one true description; a description that is guaranteed by the elimination of bias and language-ambiguity. Truth is a matter of correspondence between statements about the world contained in theories and the way the world is, its reality. It is the presence of reality, therefore, that determines truth, which is in effect, the measure of truth; presence is the voice of nature, the origin, the authorising centre, which places the necessary restrictions or limits on how the world can be described, and how it can be known. It eliminates any distortion in representing or knowing the world so that the latter can be represented in the language of knowledge. The priority or pre-existence of the world 'as it really is' over any descriptions we make of it implies that the role of language is to be a transparent medium that enables the world to be

accurately represented. Language is tied to the world through relations of correspondence between names and sentences *and* objects and states of the world. For the empiricist the only language that counts is a language which is referential and literal, with pure and unambiguous meanings, free from the distortions of interpretation (as we will see in the account of Wilfred Sellars' contra-empiricist philosophy in chapter 5).

Embodied in this notion of representational realism[2] is a picture of a universally correct standard of rationality operating according to the laws of inferential logic[3]. Individuals are considered to be endowed with the capacity, even if to varying degrees, of exercising this rationality; a rationality that is seen as an essence of a natural kind rather than an outcome and function of the norms and practices of particular societies. Knowledge can be systematically developed by deploying this invariant and universal standard of rationality. For representational realists, therefore, the history of science is that of a cumulative, linear progression from ignorance to knowledge, a steady and inexorable movement away from incompleteness and error. Here we have in plain sight a manifestation of Enlightenment thought, a suitable metaphysics of and for modernity, and what it seeks to do is establish direct relations between the world and the mind(s), so that knowing something becomes a matter of receiving in an unmediated way something outside of itself.

This positivist-empiricist view of realism is oppressive, limiting and possibly even untenable. But again we should not extrapolate from

[2] This is only one form that realism can take. It is a direct form of realism and opposed in every way to a critical theory of realism.

[3] Inferential logic is the process of using known information (premises) to reach a logical conclusion. It is a way of reasoning where you move from what you already know to what can be logically deduced or inferred from that knowledge.

this and argue that the notion of representational realism is dead. Indeed, we could argue quite the opposite, that it is still pervasive[4], despite the inroads of post-positivism, critical realism, even conceptual relativism, and has stubbornly refused to succumb to the onslaught of this critique. It is most aptly caricatured in the epistemological fetish with detachment and neutrality; a narrative of universal truth that at the same time denies the truth of the privileges, interests and politics of knowledge-developers. This concept of objectivity (as it is used in the world) contains multiple rather than singular meanings, namely, ontological objectivity (something can exist with or without it being perceived by human beings), alethic objectivity (if something meets a set of truth conditions, it is objective), positional objectivity (something is objective when the relevant knowers' traces such as values and interests are excluded), extrinsic objectivity (something is objective if it can be directly accessed through observation), method objectivity (something is objective if its mode of application to the world is correct), and warranted objectivity (something is objective when more than one knower agree on its truthfulness). In each of these ways, whilst still acknowledging that there are differences between them, we have a notion of the objectivity of knowers and learners, an objectivity that casts these knowers and learners as abstracted individuals without specificity, interchangeable and possessed only of the faculty of reason.

What this points to is that although knowing and coming to know is generally thought of as a process of finding out about the world, there is also a need to take account of the reflexive dimension in the knowledge process. Reflexivity is about exploring how meanings, including the meanings given to and generated by knowledge development activities, are discursively constructed within

[4] And never more so than in the recent report on England's national curriculum.

apperceptive and conceptualising processes. One implication of foregrounding reflexivity and discursive construction is the recognition that scientific and literary genres interpenetrate each other, and this itself has implications for epistemological questions of validity. Given the embeddedness of representational realism in western and colonial science, there has always been a rigorous exclusion (in the name of rigour) of expressive modes. These expressive modes have been consigned to literature, and so literature becomes the feared and rejected otherness of science which is always necessary to establish the credibility and very being of scientific knowledge. Literary texts are deemed to be metaphorical and allegorical, expressing inventions rather than observed facts and privileging multiple effects of meaning rather than singular meanings. Above all, they violate referential language and the principle of bivalence, narrating one thing in order to say something else, often of a contradictory nature.

The consequence of this is that as knowers and learners we need to problematise representation so that we can be reflexive about the practices of representation within which we are located; in other words, we need to engage in a signifying practice that questions the grounding and effectiveness of learning and knowledge-development as signifying practices. The implication here is that there is a need to decentre validity from its traditional position as epistemological guardian, from its false position as correspondence of thought with its object. Validity can then be seen as multiple, partial, endlessly deferred, which can interrupt or disrupt, even if it cannot entirely replace, a validity of correspondence. At this point, it is important to stress that it is not a matter of overcoming and replacing conventional notions of validity, since there would then be a danger of transgression itself becoming a new grounding. What transgressive validity does is to remind us that knowing and learning are not just

referential. It brings to our attention how the discursive does its work through and with a particular notion of truth, where, because different epistemologies (or truth games) imply different relations between people, establishing truth always involves a power struggle (see Chapter 9). Furthermore, it questions the conventional integrity of the self as a universal learner, seeing this self not as a free-standing rational individual but rather as a specific subject of difference located in a representational economy.

Truth

As I have suggested above, in trying to understand how a concept or conceptual framework functions in the world, it is important to contextualise the way it functions within our three networks or constellations of meaning: antecedent frameworks, coextensive frameworks and pragmatic frameworks. In suggesting this I am invoking a notion of truth; indeed, I cannot say anything at all, from the most profound to the relatively trivial, without doing this. In trying to discover what critical realism might or could be, I am committing myself to a truthful account of these two concepts and the object-relations that connect the one to the other. We cannot do without the idea, and yet concepts, as we have seen, are multisemic, semantically contested, networked, interactive, powerful and dynamic.

What this means is that truth as a concept can be understood in a number of different ways. There are a number of possibilities as to what these might be, such as, true knowledge might refer to hypotheses that work. Here, the burden of proof for whether a statement satisfies a set of criteria is that when this hypothesis, referring to a proposed relationship in the world, is deployed in a practical sense, it works, or at least leads to effects that the hypothesis

predicted. A second possibility might be that true knowledge is inter-subjectively agreed knowledge. Here the burden of proof is that the truth criterion for this statement about knowledge resides in whether or not the claim being made is agreed with a community of knowers that have an interest in it. A third possibility might be that true knowledge can be justified empirically; and here the burden of proof for any statement that I might want to make rests with some form of true relationship between what is in the world and my knowledge of it. The most common form that this can take is correspondence or mirroring (see Richard Rorty's (1979) arguments against this position[5]). A fourth possibility is that true knowledge is logically coherent and here an acknowledgement has to be made that it is possible to identify in a universal sense certain correct relations and consequently certain incorrect relations between words, word-sets, concepts and forms of knowledge. And there is also a credible position that can be taken, which asserts that true knowledge is such because we trust it. In effect, we have tried and trusted methods, deeply embedded in the social arrangements we have made, for judging whether evidence is reliable, including criteria for making these judgements.

There are five conceptions of truth: truth as correspondence, truth as coherence, truth as what works, truth as consensus and truth as warranted belief[6]. There may be more, but they have not yet been invented or codified. These different theories of truth are framed so that they point to a relationship between a statement and a referent; and consequently we can say if we want to adopt a correspondence theory of truth that a statement is true if it corresponds to something

[5] See also chapter 6 in this book.
[6] See Bridges, D. (1999) 'Educational Research: Pursuit of Truth or Flight of Fancy', *British Educational Research Journal*, 25, 5: 597-616.

in the world. Again, we can say, if we want to adopt a conception of truth as coherence, that a proposition is true if it is consistent with a further set of propositions, and so on, until we exhaust the possibilities which inhere in this concept.

It is also possible for us to assert, if we ignore those siren voices that are pushing us towards the taking of a sceptical position about knowledge, that the referent in each particular case is of a different order, so, for example, a correspondence version of truth refers to a state of affairs, whereas truth as warranted belief refers to whether it satisfies an epistemological test to determine its value. Furthermore, some of these conceptions of truth allow for the possibility of a social element whereas others do not. So, truth as correspondence would suggest that a belief in epistemic relativism is unsound, whereas truth as consensus is predicated on a belief that a universal a-historical warrant cannot legitimately be developed. These different theories are framed so that belief in one precludes belief in another.

Correspondence notions of truth support the idea that if there is some sort of agreement between a truthful statement and something other than a linguistic account, then we are entitled to talk about its truth or falsity. It is the correspondence between the two that allows us to make the claim that we do. Some have sought to understand this correspondence notion as being between truthful statements and the facts of the world. However, any observations that we make about the world, including those that are integral to the knowledge-development process and can be thought of as facts, are always conditioned by prior understandings we have of the world. Some word-objects and some conceptions, such as a fact, a statistic, information, data and evidence, are understood as basic and foundational, and thus as having a positive truth-value – a fact cannot be disputed, data is unchallengeable, a statistic is a truthful

representation of something in the world, gathering information allows us to go on in life with some certainty and evidence is required for us to assert that something is true. However, fact-based epistemic theories, such as empiricism and positivism, are unable to determine how the real relations in social life, those between knowledge of the world and the world itself, operate. The real question then is to ask if anything can really be given, beyond reproach or criticism or questioning[7].

Facts are given, they are out there, they cannot be disputed. But in reality facts are simpliciter propositions, knowledge fragments, power-plays, valorisations, processes, utterances, evaluations, embodiments or dispositions, that have attached to them a truth component. They are a means by which we can understand what is true or authentic; and in addition, truth is frame-specific and attached to particular objects in the world, acting as currency or truthful markers in atomic, associational, actual, linguistic, hermeneutic, structural, semantic or holistic framings (more on these framings below). The truth of something because it is frame-specific has ideological leanings. However, we must be careful here for two reasons: ideology is a hinge[8] or foundational concept, and it therefore has certain properties, such as being semantically contested, networked, interactive, powerful and dynamic; and, in addition, the polysemic nature of the concept means that we can use it in a variety of ways.

In this scenario, truth becomes a feature of an all-encompassing configuration of beliefs (in a discursive sense) as a system of

[7] See chapter 5, which looks at the work of Wilfred Sellars.

[8] This is a word used by Ludwig Wittgenstein (Wittgenstein, L. (1969) *On Certainty*, ed. G. E. M. Anscombe and G. H. von Wright, tr. D. Paul and G. E. M. Anscombe, Blackwell, Oxford) to indicate foundationality of some type or another.

interrelated ideas or propositions, logically related or historically embedded or inferentially derived. So, the truth quality or component of any remark I make about realism (and consequently, non-realism) resides in a system of other truths, in that it coheres with them, is justified by them, can be inferentially derived from them, or makes rational sense within the boundaries of that system. That system does not or cannot refer to events, occurrences, happenings, outside of the language itself. And yet within this conception of truth as coherence nothing seems to prevent there being many different systems or constellations of thought-objects.

Truth as a concept can have a pragmatic orientation, understanding this in two ways. The first of these is that since a number of theories of truth can potentially be developed, each of which is internally coherent, what ultimately happens is that at different points in the past some have been shown to be more useful than others and consequently will have a greater value. More useful systems will survive, others will be discarded[9]. The second pragmatic take on the matter of truth is deflationist or minimalist in orientation[10]. Given that we cannot have an absolutely correct appreciation of truth even if we have to use it in our activities and utterances in the world, what we need to do is put the idea of truth to one side and develop a more open-minded and open-ended process of comparing and using our belief systems. Such a process would be useful in its own right, even if it lacked any final endpoint.

Another attempt at defining or saying what truth is requires us to understand it as the development of a set of logical truth conditions

[9] This evolutionary argument is of some significance and will be discussed in more detail in chapter 3, an account of the work of Roy Wood Sellars.

[10] See Alfred Tarski (2002) 'On the Concept of Following Logically' (Magda Stroińska and David Hitchcock, trans.) *History and Philosophy of Logic,* 23: 155-96.

that we can apply to our utterances in the world; so we can say that if we say this or that, inevitably we attach to these statements a set of truth conditionals. The intention here is and was to construct a mathematical language or develop a set of symbols that would assign truth conditions to each correct sentence in a language, without also at the same time making use of semantic terms – to strip language, or the means by which we communicate, of any valuations except insofar as these valuations can be thought of as truth conditionals[11]. These assertions have two consequences. The first of these is that language systems and consequently our utterances are understood as in some way transparent in their use – this world-to-mind and mind-to-world set of relations is unmediated in its passage or process. The second consequence is that we now cannot talk with any certainty about matters of aesthetics, ethics, semantics, human well-being, and the like. The danger about reducing truth as a concept to truth conditionals is that it forecloses on the idea that languaged assertions are multi-functional. Some assertions are not truth bearers, even if some are. Rather, they are acts of imagination, useful fictions, valorised expressions and the like. The difficulty still remains: how do we truthfully distinguish between truth bearing and non-truth bearing utterances and assertions?

In my attempt at saying what realism is and what it might be I am committing myself at every step of the process to giving a truthful account. This truthful account includes, among other matters, the important (a valorised assertion) relationship between knowledge and the world. I am in the first place committing myself to its importance. I am also committing myself to a small number of

[11] A Critical Realist philosophy is, as I suggest above, a normative epistemological construction.

foundational or hinged[12] propositions, which have some credence and can be thought of as being essential, if we are using a language, to our language games, thinking processes and conceptual schemes.

My concern in the first place is to identify the contents of the world, that is to identify what is outside my mind and in addition outside other minds at a particular moment of time. We can think of these objects in the world as unknowable to our minds, although even here we are straying from a sense of unknowability by suggesting that things in the world have distinguishable properties. We can say then at the level of language the world is always differentiated in one way or another. In describing it and acting in and on it we use categories, concepts and differentiating principles of one type or another. There would be no point of talking about it, and indeed we could not talk about it at all, if every perceptual instance was the same as all the others we receive. There is a further important underlying principle that we need to take on board and this is that we do not receive what is out there in the same way as every other human being. Difference is a key concept in our relations with the world.

We can even position these worldly objects as discursive objects, material objects, object-relations, discursive combinations of primary objects, material combinations of primary objects, and agential objects in the mind. Examples of what I am calling here discursive objects are: words, meanings, grammatical terms, arguments, inferences and much more. Examples of material objects are: trees, mountains, flowers, earth, houses and the like. Examples of these object-relations

[12] This is a term used by Ludwig Wittgenstein in his 'Philosophical Investigations' (Wittgenstein, L. (2009), *Philosophical Investigations*, revised 4th edn. edited by P. M. S. Hacker and Joachim Schulte, tr. G. E. M. Anscombe, P. M. S. Hacker and Joachim Schulte, Wiley-Blackwell, Oxford), which is discussed in greater detail in chapter 4.

expressed dualistically are: one-to-one or one-to-many relations (where the relation between objects is manifested as an object-to-object relation or as an object-to-objects relation), strong or weak relations (where this refers to the probative force of the object-relation), vertical or horizontal relations (where this refers to whether hierarchies or flat structures of objects are being created), corrosive or developmental relations (where this refers to the consequences of the activation of the powers of an object on another object or objects – what type of change results), endogenous or exogenous relations (where this refers to the direction of change in the original object – internal or external), enabling or constraining functionality (where the direction and impulsion of the object-relation is towards one or the other), feed-back or feed-forward relations (where this refers to the temporality of the change process), convergence or divergence (where the end-point is towards a monistic or pluralistic categorisation of knowledge), framing or reframing relations (where this refers to the semantics of the change process), categorising or recategorising relations (where the concern here is with the essence or non-essence of objects in the world) and subsumptive or contiguous relations (where this refers to the impact of the interaction on both objects, whether the impact is integral or peripheral). Examples of discursive object-configurations are ethics, critical realism, morality, realism, transcoloniality, decoloniality, abstraction, etc. Examples of material and discursive object-configurations are curriculum, university, family, welfare state, architecture and the like. Qualities that a human being qua their humanness possesses might be reason-giving, intentionality, agency, responsiveness and so on. These examples are always and only languaged and therefore have properties such as inter-textuality, interconnectedness, semanticity, semioticity, and more.

Frameworks

Any assertions that I make in the pages of this book will point in the first instance to the possibilities and, as importantly, limitations, of a word, word-set or linguistically-structured concept with the purpose of determining meaning. The aim, first and foremost, is a semantic one. If the task is semantic then we are necessarily concerned with determining the truth or otherwise of the statements we make about the world, including the one that begins this sentence. However, what we can take from this brief discussion of the semantic implications of using a concept such as realism in our utterances and actions in the world is that any reading or interpretation is epistemically enframed in some way or another, and that these epistemic frames designate a unit or type of object as being the carrier of veridicality and truth within the frame.

Here are some frames or framings that might enable us to do this: the frame of molecules and atoms, the frame of associations between variables, the function or use-in-the-world frame, the frame of events and event(ing)s, the linguistic frame, the hermeneutic frame, the semantic frame, and the universal or transcendental frame. This list places these frames in an order. However, this is not a straight-forward hierarchical set of objects where the atomic frame is the lowest point (has the least purchase on the problem that we are seeking a solution to) and the transcendental frame is the highest point (has the most purchase on the problem as it is defined), with other levels equally distanced between the meanings given to the first and last frames. Here different criteria are being applied to these different frames and this complicates the description of the relations between them.

If we focus on and commit ourselves to the atomic level, where the medium is the atomic particle, we are necessarily adopting a physicalist view of consciousness, a belief that consciousness and individual thought is an illusion or at least that this illusion is composed of these atomic particles, a reductionist methodology that is bereft of meaning, and a causal relationship to other levels of explanation or other frames. Criterial judgements are made in this framework in relation to the atomic particle: everything else follows from it[13].

At the level of association we are committing ourselves to a reductionist methodology or reductionist way of seeing the world. The detheorisation of much contemporary research and philosophy, for example, involves a separating out of the concept from the framework in order for it to have the properties of a variable. Having detheorised the concept, relations are then identified between these different variables, even if the variable itself does not have a meaningful relationship with the world. We can see this most obviously in studies which we call associational. The base unit of truth here is the variable: everything else follows from it.

The function or use-in-the-world frame suggests that there is a set of social structures that exist independently from individuals. This social structure consists of material and discursive objects, object relations and configurations passed on in various ways through institutions that shape the individual. This has been conceived of as being similar to the way a human body works. These are interconnected and interdependent parts which function for the good of the whole.

[13] For example, Peter Carruthers (2005) *Consciousness: essays from a higher-order perspective*, Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Criterial judgements are made in this framework in relation to the object, understood in a decontextualised way.

Within the frame of events and event(ing)s, social processes unfold over time, operate from moment to moment in the present, and have no duration. In addition, all social processes, such as socialisation, being critical, learning, education, birth and death, are understood as discrete occurrences, even if they are connected to each other by other discrete occurrences. Events are actual time-space happenings that can be understood directly and in a non-mediative way. This is the frame of conventional history. The basic units of truth here are the event and the fact – everything else follows from them.

The language frame is more difficult to comprehend. The issue is that our attempts at describing the world are always and inevitably circumscribed by the condition (and contents) of our language, and what this means is that this language set (the one we use) – its structures, its structured meanings (the semantic dimension), its ways of asserting what is true knowledge and what is false knowledge, its designation of the types of relationships between mind and world that can exist, in short, its determination of what reality is like – is the prime determinant of our way of life. This argument – that we cannot operate in any sense outside of a language or a set of languages – is contingent on the idea that there are no universals, such as thought universals, behavioural universals, existential universals, meta-physical universals; or to put it in a different way, we cannot think, operate, exist or speculate outside (without using) a language. And further to this, since language is our world, we cannot know if there is another world outside of the language or languages we are using. Criterial judgements are made in this framework in relation to the

phonology, morphology, syntactics, semantics and pragmatics of our language[14].

If we work within the frame of interpretation, then we understand human action as inseparable from meaning-making, with our experiences organised through pre-formulated interpretive framings. Interpretivists believe that we belong to traditions of thought, and the task of the theorist is to make sense of these interpretations, even though such interpretive activity is mediated through the theorist's own frame of reference. The field of study is therefore the meaningful actions of social actors and social institutions. Criterial judgements are made in this framework in relation to the interpreted object.

Semantics is a linguistic theory, where meaning relates fundamentally to a linguistic object or set of objects and not to what those linguistic tropes refer to, those objects, object-relations, object-configurations or agents that exist outside of the language in which they are being expressed. There are two general approaches: referential approaches and use-theoretic approaches. The first of these understands the semantic properties of linguistic expressions in a conceptual form as broadly referential in that their primary relation is to extra-linguistic objects and other language sets. We talk and think in relation to the referential properties of these other objects. The use-theoretic approach focuses on the regularities or rules of use. Under this conception, it is these rules and regularities which account for meaning and conceptual content. However, these have weak referential relations to the outside world. Criterial judgements are made in this framework in relation to units of meaning.

[14]Much more than this will be said in this book, since what I am arguing for is a semantic linguistic philosophy.

In the universal or transcendental domain, a distinction can be drawn between the way the world works and how these workings can be expressed. Meta-knowledge statements, then, refer to a material world, can be construed as discursive objects in the world and are expressed as true statements about this and other worlds. They do not seem to be relative to particular manifestations of human existence but are universal in intent and scope. They are deemed to be rational, or at least they are seen as parts of a system of thought, where the criteria for determining whether something is rational or not includes some notion of what could constitute intelligibility. The basic unit of truth here is universal or transcendental.

These eight levels or frames then are: atomic, associational, functional, factual or event(ing), linguistic, hermeneutic, semantic and universal. They enframe the concepts and praxes that are associated with realist perspectives and practices, and in turn are enframed themselves. Critical realism if it is to have any meaning at all has to be understood then in relation to the characteristics of world-to-mind and mind-to-world relations and connections: a mind-independent reality, an apperceptive and transformative process of world-to-mind and mind-to-world relations, a critical view of knowledge, a post-empiricist ontology and a normative epistemology[15].

Reading the text(s)

Reading a text can be construed in a number of ways, principally either as an action in the world or as a conceptual activity in the mind. In this opening chapter I am more concerned with the latter than the former; however, we, in our everyday lives, read texts in both ways

[15]Again, my contention is that a normative element is an essential part of all and every critical realist framework.

all the time[16]. A number of approaches to reading texts have been developed. The first of these is monosemic[17] and this means that a definitive reading can be made of a text. However, this type of reading still requires a correct approach to be adopted, and this comprises: a bracketing out of values and value-positions (the reader is able to put to one side their preconceptions and prejudgements during the reading[18]), the making of a series of semantic inferences from the text (the reader uses the one correct way of deriving meaning from the assemblage of words and other extra- and para-linguistic forms) and being comprehensive (the reader is not selective in any way). This correct reading is not equivalent to the intentions of the author or primary agent, as she may not have fully appreciated the meaning of the words that she set down on paper (or on the Internet). Furthermore, she may have changed her mind about what her text actually means. However, there is within the text being examined an unequivocal statement of meaning, which can only be grasped through the use of a universal method.

A second approach is also monosemic, but here the primary focus is the intentions of the author or agent. The text allows an unequivocal reading because that reading is consistent with these intentions. Again, this type of reading comprises the use of a universal method. A number of implications follow from this. It would be wrong to talk about a text being read in a number of different ways, because the

[16] Your reading of this book then is textually framed. As a text it is a signifying practice, and as a signifying practice it has to question its own textuality and indeed the discursive contents that it is committing to, a practice that is now barely adhered to by most writers in the field of critical realism.

[17] In this case there is a double hermeneutic at work, since a concept of reading will also have to deal (at least in part) with the reading of concepts and the relations between them.

[18] The phenomenological reduction then is this attempt to suspend self and other viewpoints and preconceived perspectives on the world.

author intended it to be read in one particular way. Since the purpose of reading a text is to reconstruct what was in the mind of the author and not to make sense of collections and arrangements of words, the text itself acts only as a piece of evidence, albeit an important piece, from which the intentions of the author can be reconstructed. (It is perhaps appropriate here to point to the real question that should come to mind when we are dealing with a notion of evidence, which is: what is evidence? rather than the frequently asked question: what is the evidence for this or that proposition?[19]) There are a number of problems with the idea that, when reading a text, the reader should always focus their attention on what the author of the text intended. Firstly, the author may not know her own authorial intention with the required degree of certainty. Secondly, the author may have deliberately crafted a text that allows a number of different readings. The meaning cannot reside in the text, but in the way in which it is read. Furthermore, the form the text takes or the way in which the thought processes of the author or agent are translated into textual form – its textuality – is time-oriented[20], which complicates the process of inferring authorial intention from the text.

A third approach focuses on reading the text and its enframings. This is a word used by Martin Heidegger (1962), translated from the original German word, *Gestell*, to denote those social, geo-historical, temporal, epistemological, political and discursive frames within which our utterances are ineluctably embedded. The text and the way in which it is read are enframed. Heidegger (1962: 191) pointed to the 'fore-structure' of interpretation, and he meant by this that an interpretation is never 'a presuppositionless apprehending of

[19] The use of a reductionist and detheorised notion of evidence is common in academic texts currently.

[20] We read the past from the perspective of the present.

something presented to us', but always involves a 'fore-having', 'fore-sight' and 'fore-conception'[21]. Historical texts are therefore read in terms of their pre-texts: each social and discursive formation has its own way of organising language, discourses and writing, and thus any historical text has a form that is unfamiliar to the reader. Furthermore, each text has a sub-text, which operates beneath the text, but which gives it its meaning – those epistemologies and traditions of knowledge which are historical, and which allow a particular reading. This ties together interpretation and understanding; and it demonstrates that our interactions with the world are not preconditionless, but involve processes of fore-having, fore-sight and fore-conception.

There are a number of solutions to the problems created by the assertion that textual reading is immersed in history and society. The first of these is to accept that any interpretation that is made is perspectival, and that is as far as anyone can go. The second possibility is that we can in some way transcend the historicity of our own interpretative stance. Hans-Georg Gadamer (1989) suggested this, although it is not a complete solution. Instead of proposing that an unequivocal reading of a text is possible, he suggested that if we can understand the different contexts and pre-texts of a text, then this in itself constitutes a better way of reading it. For Gadamer, wrestling as he did with the respective claims of authority and tradition, reading a text can be a reasonable activity, provided we understand that this is not an objective endorsement of authority. Heidegger's (1962) insistence on the place of the fore-structure in any interpretation we might want to make is in large measure a reassertion of this position.

[21] See Scott, D. and Usher, R. (2011) *Researching Education*, London: Continuum.

When we read a text, we are making contact with the world or at least a part of it.

In the next chapter I look at some key notions in and of the discursive structure of critical realism, those of perception and apperception, both concepts being central to an understanding of critical realism, and of world-to-mind and mind-to-world relations. Introducing these two concepts into the argument being developed in the book, I am also suggesting, meets part of the requirements for a genuine critical realist perspective, with the understanding that this should entail beliefs in: a mind-independent reality, an apperceptive and transformative process of world-to-mind and mind-to-world relations, a use theory of meaning, a critical view of knowledge, a post-empiricist ontology and a normative epistemology.