Holism: possibilities and problems

Emergence & 'Things-in-Themselves'

Written & Drawn by Ian Hornsby
Preamble
HERE’S ANOTHER ONE ABOUT YOU AND ME!

REALLY! ARE YOU GOING TO SAY THAT EVERY TIME YOU PICK UP AN ABSTRACT?

WELL, IT IS, TAKE A LOOK!

GILLES! THEY ALL ARE. IT’S THE POINT OF THE CONFERENCE. ALL OF THE PAPERS COMBINE TO FORM A WHOLE LARGER THAN THE SUM OF ITS PARTS.

WELL! THAT’S A COINCIDENCE! THIS ONE’S ABOUT “THE PROBLEMS AND POSSIBILITIES OF HOLISM”.

YOU DON’T SAY!

YOU’RE SUCH AN EASY MARK, CARL. MY OLD FRIEND!
Gilles, just tell me what the paper is about?

Well it claims that an understanding of holism, in both of our texts, is best understood in terms of 'emergence':

The critical realist articulation of the irreducibility of the constituent levels of reality.

Let me see! Pass it over.

Now look what you made me do!

Grab it!
The relationship between two terms such that one diachronically arises out of the other, but is capable of reacting back on the first event or any event of a taxonomically irreducible sort of structure or moral to body (Bhaskar 1998, p. 73).

Emergent properties are therefore relational; they are not contained in the elements themselves but could not exist apart from them. (Archer 1982, P. 475)

How is emergence possible? If we accept that emergent wholes are more than the sum of their parts, but also that emergence allows nothing to be present in the whole that is not present in the parts, then where does that ‘more’ come from? (Elderass 2004, P. 4)

Emergence comes from the organisation of the parts, from the maintenance of a stable set of relations between the parts that constitutes them into a part-whole kind of whole (Atmachie, et. al. 106).

In emergence, generally, new beings (entities, structures, totalities, concepts) are generated out of pre-existing material from which they could have been neither induced nor deduced (Bhaskar 2008 p. 49).

Emergence presupposes the rejection of the antagonism of (normative) Physicalism and (typically spiritualist) dualism alike, either of which can sustain a concept of agentic agency, presupposing intentional materiality, applied and efficacious causality (Collier 1998 p. 599).

For Critical Realism emergence is simply another way of articulating and defending their thesis of the irreducibility of the constituent levels of reality: We would not try to explain the power of water to extinguish fire by deriving it from the powers of its constituents, for oxygen and hydrogen are highly inflammable, in such cases objects are said to have ‘emergent powers’, or ‘emergent liabilities which cannot be reduced to those of their constituents...”

In this sense ‘emergent properties’ are a function of externally related objects or structures, because the systems which define them as such grant their emergent properties. In societies they would not possess apart from their interaction or combination as parts of a whole (Creaven 2007 p. 47).

The Second Law of Thermodynamics states that all energy systems “run down” like a clock and never rewind themselves. But life not only “runs up”, converting low-energy sea-water, sunlight and air into high-energy chemicals, it keeps multiplying its state into more and better clocks that keep “running up” faster and faster. (Frisig 1974 p. 159)
An Oblique Offering
NAY, ANSWER ME, STAND AND UNFOLD YOURSELF

HUH? WHO’S THERE?

DAD, YOU’RE SUCH AN IDIOT.

WHERE ARE WE?

CAN’T YOU FEEL THE WARM WIND UPON YOUR CHEEK?

THE WHAT?

NO? ‘TIS BITTER COLD.

SON, WE MADE IT TO THE SURFACE?

WELL! TECHNICALLY, YOU MADE IT, I JUST WOKE UP HERE, NOT THE SAME THING. AND JUST FOR THE RECORD, IF THIS IS “THE SURFACE”, PRETTY UNIMPRESSIVE, BECAUSE I CAN’T SEE A THING, UNLESS DARKNESS IS A THING NOW?

TO LIVE ONES’ LIFE WITHOUT WONDERING WHAT’S BEYOND THE CONFINES OF THE CAVE, NOW THAT WOULD BE DARKNESS.

SO; YOU DECIDED TO BRING ME ALONG TOO; FOR WHAT... COMPANY, AND WITHOUT ASKING?

NAY! SO THAT YOU MAY APPROVE MY EYES AND SPEAK OF IT! SO, THAT ON OUR RETURN THEY CANNOT SAY ‘TIS OUR FANCY.

OUR FANCY?

NO; YOU’RE RIGHT; WHEN WE ENTREAT THEM TO LEAVE THE COMFORTS OF THE HEARTH, AND EXPERIENCE THE GREAT NOTHINGNESS THAT IS THE SURFACE, THEY WILL NOT THINK US MAD AT ALL?
Well if you put it like that; my gods you’re like your mother, you ruin every bit of fun.

Fun?

Where’s your sense of adventure?

Tis exactly what I’m trying to do, speak of something. This is a rite of passage, a coming of age, an initiation, a transition ritual, a walkabout, a climb out...

Yeah, I get it!

We’re the first of our people to have ever left the cave.

I wonder why that is? With all these views...

Dad! What are we doing here?

Do you want to speak of something?

It wasn’t always like this.

That’s a shame; can we go home now?

There are tales from long ago.

Oh no, here we go!

That out here beyond the confines of the caves, and before all of this nothing, there was...
Ah, Bronzel! From now on it shall only be used for good...
WE'D COME TO KNOW THE ART (EXCUSE THE EXPRESSION) OF WAR, THROUGH CONSTANT PRACTICE, OVER A THOUSAND GENERATIONS...

AND NOT MERELY INTELLECTUALLY, BUT WE HAD FELT IT TOO.

WE HAD FELT THE WEAPONS IN OUR HANDS

EVERY KIND OF WEAPON, FROM THE SPEAR TO THE ATOMIC BOMB

AND WE HAD FELT THE EFFECTS OF EACH 'ADVANCE', TOO.
Penny for your thoughts?

What must the world be like for our ideas about it to be both practical and meaningful?

I wasn’t expecting that!

Then I’ll be expecting a large tip.

Grab a seat buddy; I’ll be over to take your order in a sec.
This place looks fine, don't you think?

Hmm!

What? I merely said to the taxi driver "that all processes of individuation must confront a psychotic moment, a dialectic confrontation between ego and the void."

How was I to know that the 'driver' was a part-time Lacanian?

It wasn't what you said.

Well, I think you can ignore what Lacanian's say?

You're very good at talking Gilles, but listening, not so good. Let's just be thankful that you're not a clinician.

I didn't hear your reply, please go on, I'm all ears.
SO! WHAT CAN I GET FOR YOU THIS MORNING, DUDE?

SO, YOU'RE A PRAGMATIST THEN?

AND YOU'RE NOT ONE FOR SMALL TALK, I SEE?

BUT, YEAH, I SUPPOSE SO. I DO TEND TO EVALUATE ANY SET OF BELIEFS IN TERMS OF THEIR PRACTICAL APPLICATION; BUT I WOULD GUESS THAT I FAVOUR A MORE CRITICAL REALIST APPROACH TO THINKING OR WHAT I WANT TO CALL PRAGMATIC ONTOLOGICAL MATERIALISM.

THAT'S QUITE A MOUTHFUL. I DON'T SEE IT CATCHING ON SOME HOW?

WHAT DOES A PRAGMATIC ONTOLOGICAL MATERIALIST DO...

LET ALONE, WHAT DOES IT MEAN?

What must the natural world be like for our scientific experiment to be a meaningful activity?

What must the social world be like for our analysis of social activities and culture to be helpful?

And

What must social structures be like, for our practices to aid human agency and emancipation?

HAVE A LOOK AT THIS WHILE I TAKE A COUPLE OF ORDES, AND THEN I'LL BE BACK OVER.
Gilles,

In refusing to face what you term, the 'psychotic moment', societies invariably emerge composed entirely of de-individualised human beings, who are completely at mercy of psychotic individualists.

Excuse me for interrupting, but doesn't Marx write, in the Grundrisse, that "society does not consist of individuals, but expresses the sum of connections and relations, in which these individuals stand with respect to one another."

This sovereign remedy of mass action of which you speak so highly, my dear, is not the answer. It merely extinguishes the individual altogether...

A million zeros joined together do not add up to one!!

But several billion 'alienated' 'zeros' will add up to more than the sum of their parts.
THAT’S NOT THE MOST POSITIVE FORM OF HOLISM THAT YOU PUT FORWARD.

WHAT!!! EMANCIPATION FOR THE WORLDS’ PROLETARIAT!

MASS ACTION WILL ALWAYS DENY THE INDIVIDUAL THE IRRATIONAL FACTORS REQUIRED TO BE ‘EMANCIPATED’ FROM THE HERD.

MASS ACTION IS NOT THE ACCOMPLISHMENTS OF A HERD. IT IS THE PHILOSOPHERS STONE; THE TRANSMUTATION OF LEAD INTO GOLD; OF ZEROS INTO ONES; IT’S THE TRANSCENDENT ELEMENT.

MASS ACTION, IN A VERY REAL SENSE, IS EMERGENCE, THE DIACHRONIC EVENT OF CREATIVE IMMANENT UNFOLDING FROM WHICH SOMETHING EMERGES OUT OF A SEEMING NOTHINGNESS.

ANYWAY!!! GENTLEMEN, WHAT CAN I GET FOR YOU?

WHAT WOULD YOU RECOMMEND? WE ARE LOOKING FOR SOMETHING MODEST!

I’D GO FOR THE CLASSIC HUMBLE PIE & MASH, IF I WERE YOU!!!
This is all very interesting but it doesn't tell me much about P.O.M.

About what!!!


Oooww! I hate acronyms.

But you're a critical realist? Bhaskar's writing is littered with them. It's what puts everyone off.

Which is one of the reasons why I call my ideas Pragmatic Ontological Materialism, and not Critical Realism.

So break it down for me.

OK! But don't say I didn't warn you.

By Pragmatic I mean the sense of judging any set of beliefs via their practical application.

As for ontology? Well...
...LET'S JUST ASK,
WHAT KIND OF BEINGS AND
ENTITIES WOULD YOU
STAKE A CLAIM TO BE
POPULATING YOUR WORLD?
THAT'S ONTOLOGY...

IT'S CONCERNED WITH
THE MOST BASIC
PRESUPPOSITIONS
OF ANY PHILOSOPHY.
THE THINGS THAT
UNDERPIN OUR IDEAS AND
THAT WE TAKE FOR
GRANTED.

EVERYTHING WE SAY AND
THINK IS BASED UPON
PRESUPPOSITIONS, UPON
SEVERAL UNEDEFINED
ASSUMPTIONS.
IF YOU DON'T HAVE
PRESUPPOSITIONS YOU ARE
CONDEMNED TO SAYING
NOTHING, REPEATEDLY.

THIS PROCESS OF BASING
OUR IDEAS UPON
ASSUMPTIONS
IS BETTER KNOWN AS
METAPHYSICS,
A TERM OF DERISION THAT
NEEDS TO BE RECLAIMED
FROM ITS PLACE OF
CONDEMNATION IN
CONTEMPORARY THINKING.
MATERIALISM, IS THE IDEA THAT THE WORLD HAS AN EXISTENCE INDEPENDENT FROM THE CONTENTS OF OUR MINDS. THAT THERE IS A MIND INDEPENDENT REALITY OUTSIDE OF OUR CONSCIOUSNESS OF IT.

BUT, IF ALL THE HUMAN MINDS IN THE WORLD VANISHED OVERNIGHT, THEN ALTHOUGH COMMUNITIES, CULTURES, AND BUILDINGS, WOULD STILL EXIST, THEY WOULD CEASE TO FUNCTION IN THE WAY THEY DO IN A WORLD THAT INCLUDES HUMAN MINDS.

FOR MATERIALISTS, ALTHOUGH THE WORLD EXISTS INDEPENDENTLY OF OUR THOUGHTS, MEANING DOES NOT, AND THEREFORE, INSTITUTIONS, ART, AND SCIENCE, DO NOT EXIST WITHOUT MINDS AND BODIES TO CREATE, ACTIVATE, AND INTERPRET THEM.

THIS IS NOT A HUGE CLAIM, YET CALLING YOURSELF A REALIST TODAY IS LIKE CALLING YOURSELF A METAPHYSICIAN; IT PLACES YOU ON THE WRONG SIDE OF CONTEMPORARY THINKING.
I accept we're not made from solid matter, as my dear friend Wolfgang has illustrated to me during many conversations together; but lately, I feel as though it is not only my body that struggles against the power of entropy but that my entire being is phasing out of existence.

Might it be that you have been driven to these thoughts because you have witnessed such suffering on a personal and professional level.

I wish it were such traumas that had brought me to this state, but I have begun to see and experience other horrors too.

Describe these unthinkable deceptions.

Only a moment ago when visiting the 'men's room', I found there to be nothing beyond this room; only a thick black impenetrable line.
NOW THAT YOU MENTION IT, I’VE BEGUN TO FEEL A STRANGE PRESENCE LOOMING OVER US TOO.

I’M GOING TO INVESTIGATE FOR MYSELF!

IT IS AS YOU SAY...

BUT WE SHOULD TAKE COMFORT IN THE FACT THAT WE’RE BOTH EXPERIENCING THIS PHENOMENON TOGETHER.
SURELY WE ARE BOTH DEAD AND THIS IS SOME DREADFUL FORM OF PURGATORY?

OH GOD! I HOPE NOT. I COULDN'T STAND SUCH A IGNOMINIOUS DEMISE.

WHAT'S THAT BEFORE US?
DID YOU SEE THOSE TWO OLD FELLAS LEAVE?

THEY WERE SITTING AT THAT TABLE JUST OVER THERE!

WHICH GUYS?

I'LL TAKE THAT AS A NO! THEN.

I'D LIKE TO HEAR MORE ABOUT SOME OF THE FORCES...

...HOLDING THIS PROCESS OF YOURS BACK?

THE MOST PERNICIOUS CULPRIT IS POSITIVISM.

...INVESTIGATION TOWARDS THE PRODUCTION OF UNIVERSAL LAWS.

BUT ISN'T POSITIVISM SIMPLY THE CLAIM THAT ALL KNOWLEDGE MUST BE BASED ON LOGICAL DEDUCTION, AND PROVEN THROUGH EMPIRICAL...

ALONGSIDE THE IDEA THAT THERE IS NO KNOWLEDGE...

...OTHER THAN A POSTERIORI KNOWLEDGE AND THAT ALL A PRIORI PRESUPPOSITIONS ARE PURE NONSENSE.
AH YES! INSULTING YOUR LOVE FOR METAPHYSICS. BUT AREN’T THESE CLAIMS THE BENCHMARK FOR ALL GOOD SCIENCE AND PROOF TODAY?

NOT ONLY IS THIS CLAIM ITSELF BASED UPON PRESUPPOSITIONS...

IT ALSO RELIES ON AN EPISTEMIC FALLACY... THE IDEA THAT STATEMENTS ABOUT BEING SHOULD BE ERADICATED IN FAVOUR OF STATEMENTS ABOUT KNOWLEDGE.

RIGHT! HMMM! I DON’T ACTUALLY SEE WHAT’S SO TERRIBLY WRONG WITH THAT. SCIENCE OVER MYSTICISM.

BUT THAT WOULD MEAN THAT WE ARE ADDRESSING THE MAP AND NOT THE TERRITORY.

DIDN’T YOU ALREADY SAY THAT WE COULDN’T EVER KNOW THE TERRITORY ITSELF! SO DON’T WE HAVE TO RELY ON MAPS?

ABSOLUTLEY!!! BUT ACKNOWLEDGING THAT YOU’RE RELYING ON MAPS IS VERY DIFFERENT FROM ACCEPTING THE MAP AS THE TERRITORY.

THE ONTOLOGICAL CHALLENGE TO POSITIVISM IS THAT ALL OF ITS LAWS AND LAW-LIKE PREDICTIONS...

ARE ACTUALLY PRODUCED IN CLOSED SYSTEMS; LIKE LABORATORIES AND THE ROOMS OF ECONOMICS PROFESSORS, WHICH ARE FIXED IN TIME. BUT THESE ENVIRONMENTS ARE NOT THE WORLD THAT WE ALL LIVE IN; THE OPEN SYSTEMS OF CHANGE AND MULTIPICLITY.
BUT IF YOU'RE SAYING THAT POSITIVISMS' LAWS DON'T WORK IN OPEN SYSTEMS, THAT'S A BIT UNFAIR, BECAUSE NO LAW CAN TAKE...

...ACCOUNT OF CHANGE OR THE CHAOS OF THE WORLD.

...TO MAKE CLAIMS TO TRUTH AND FOUND LAWS, THAT WILL HAVE DEVASTATING AFFECT UPON PEOPLES LIVES, BASED MERELY UPON METAPHORS. WHO ARE THE MYSTICS NOW?

INDEED!!! SO IT MAKES NO SENSE AT ALL...

FAIR POINT!

ALTHOUGH POSITIVISM SHOULD HAVE DIED LONG AGO; TODAY FREE MARKET SYSTEMS OF ECONOMICS...

ARE BASED ON MODELS MADE IN CLOSED SYSTEMS. PHYSICS IS TIED TO LAWS CREATED IN CLOSE SYSTEMS, AND PHILOSOPHERS HAVE BECOME CARTOGRAPHERS WHO REMAIN HERMETICALLY SEALED OFF FROM THE WORLD.

AND WHEN THESE LAWS, MODELS AND MAPS ARE USED IN THE WORLD, THEY IMplode!!!

BUT IF THESE LAWS, MODELS, AND MAPS, HAVE BECOME THE WORLD! HOW CAN WE TURN THIS AROUND?

AHHHHH!!!!!
I've done it!!
I'm emerging into the world of the generative mechanisms of the real!!
It's the crossroads of the actual and the empirical...
The junction to pragmatic ontological materialism!

To Be Continued...
WORKS REFERENCED AND CITED


WORKS REFERENCED AND CITED (CONT’D)


PREAMBLE

PAGE ii

PAGE iii

PAGE 1
THE IMAGE IN THE BACKGROUND OF THIS PAGE IS BASED ON IMAGE 64# FROM C.G. JUNG’S LIBER NOVUS (THE RED BOOK) P.95, ED SONÚS SHAMDASANI, W.W. NORTON AND COMPANY LONDON, (2009).

PAGE 5
IMAGES IN PANEL 8-9 ARE BASED ON ADRIAN TOMINE’S FOURTH OF JULY PUBLISHED IN OPTIC NERVE DRAWN AND QUARTERLY 2008.

PAGE 6
FOR PANELS 4 AND 5 OF THIS PAGE AS ABOVE

PAGE 7
THE PROMETHEUS SCULPTURE IN PANELS 5,6, & 8, IS BASED ON IS A 1934 GILDED CAST BRONZE SCULPTURE BY PAUL MANSHP, LOCATED ABOVE THE LOWER PLAZA AT ROCKEFELLER CENTER IN MANHATTAN, NEW YORK CITY.

PAGE 8
THIS PAGE IS BASED UPON PETER BERTING’S ART FROM PAGES 6-7 OF MIKE MIGNOLA’S BALTIMORE THE RED KING #1 DARK HORSE COMICS INC. (2017).

PAGE 14

PAGE 24
THE IMAGE ON THIS PAGE IS BASED ON JACK ‘THE KING’ KIRBY’S ARTWORK FROM FANTASTIC FOUR #51 PAGE 14 JUNE 1966, MARVEL COMICS GROUP.
A CALL FOR PAPERS

WE'RE NOT YOUR CATS AND DOGS TO BE FED ON THE SCRAPS OF PARTY POLITICS ALONE; WE WANT TO KNOW EVERYTHING THAT OTHERS KNOW.

WE WANT TO LEARN THE DETAILS OF ALL ASPECTS OF POLITICAL LIFE, AND TO TAKE PART ACTIVELY IN EVERY SINGLE POLITICAL EVENT.

FOR US TO DO THIS, YOU INTELLECTUALS MUST INFORM US OF WHAT WE CAN NEVER LEARN FROM OUR CALL CENTRES AND "ECONOMIC" EXPERIENCE, THAT IS, YOU MUST GIVE US POLITICAL KNOWLEDGE.

YOU HAVE ACCESS TO THIS KNOWLEDGE AND THE CRITICAL TOOLS TO UNLOCK IT, AND IT IS YOUR DUTY TO BRING IT TO US IN A MILLION TIMES GREATER MEASURE THAN YOU HAVE DONE UP UNTIL NOW...

...AND YOU MUST BRING IT TO US, NOT ONLY IN THE FORM OF NARROW, GAZING ARGUMENTAL, CONVOLUTED PAMPHLETS AND ARTICLES WHICH, EXCUSE OUR FRANKNESS, ARE BORING AS SHIT!

YOU MUST BRING US THESE THINGS IN THE FORM OF VIVID EXPOSURES OF WHAT OUR GOVERNING CLASSES ARE DOING AT THIS VERY MOMENT IN ALL SPHERES OF LIFE.

DEVOTE MORE ZEAL TO CARRYING OUT YOUR DUTY, AND TALK LESS ABOUT "RAISING THE ACTIVITY OF THE MASSES OF WORKERS!"

BECAUSE WE'RE FAR MORE ACTIVE AND ABLE THAN YOU THINK, AND IT IS NOT FOR YOU TO "RAISE" OUR ACTIVITY, BECAUSE ACTIVITY IS PRECISELY THE THING YOU YOURSELVES LACK!

BOW LESS IN WORSHIP TO YOUR OWN CAREERS, LADIES AND GENTLEMEN; AND THINK MORE ABOUT THE EMANCIPATION OF ALL YOUR FELLOW CITIZENS OF THE WORLD!"