ON THE CRITICAL REALISM OF 'DARK MOUNTAIN' AND WHAT IT SAYS ABOUT 'HUMAN RESOURCES'

A Blog in Reference to https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rjV77UYZVQg

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In 2014, the year in which Bhaskar died, two British authors – Paul Kingsnorth and Dougald Hine – infuriated some too well-adjusted people by saying that:

> *We believe that the roots of these [ecological and political] crises [brought about*
>
> *global warming] – lie in the stories we have been telling ourselves, namely, the*
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> *myth of progress, the myth of human centrality, and the myth of our separation*
>
> *from 'nature'"*,

declaring, in addition, that these human stories "are more dangerous for the fact that we have forgotten that they are myths" (Dark Mountain Manifesto).

In other words: conventional, 'logical', thinking constantly creates MYTHS (or irrealities, as Bhaskar has called them).

In light of Bhaskar's writings on *Critical Realism*, particularly his 1993 on 'Dialectic: The pulse of freedom', it is, I think, important to comment that these 'stories' are deeply rooted in the very structure of the thinking *homo sapiens* has exercised throughout the entire history of Western philosophy, and with global swagger since the end of World War II when the fossil-fuel orgy of progress carried out by industry began to take on international shape.

As Bhaskar saw it, human stories and myths are not just contents; they tell the truth about human thinking. They are contents *structurally rooted in the conventional thinking of homo sapiens* for whom 'A' is always 'A' which forbids relating A to, or seeing it as co-incident with B. Through this separation, B becomes 'false', rather than being seen as an integral part of 'A' which is needed to fully understand the falseness (limitations) of 'A'.

This de-totalizing **identity theory of the world**, first pointed out by the Frankfurt School and then by George Bateson, naturally leads to the myth of human centrality. Through the subject/object split between 'me' and 'the world' (as not-me), it leads further to the separation of homo sapiens from 'nature'. This separation, then, becomes a justification for the myth of 'progress' which is based on the subjugation of nature as an 'object out there' with no influence on 'me' – a humungous fallacy as global warming demonstrates.

Bhaskar showed quite cogently that it is the subject/object split in identity theory that reduces 'nature' to an 'environment' for humans, rather than allowing humans to conceive of nature as an organized whole of living organisms one of which happens to be homo sapiens.

This misconception is still the daily bread of *homo economicus*, the driving force of pernicious progress, despite of all the nice theories of a 'green economy'. *Homo economicus* excels in 'objectivity', objective rational thought 'which allows us to look at nature analytically and break it down into little parts, in order to measure and manipulate it. It is, unfortunately, also the daily bread of 'environmentalism' which is equally prey to the subject/object split.

This leads to Kingsnorth and Hine's question of how, then, can we begin 'to see the planet as a narrative challenge' as to "who we are, what we are, what this world we are in is"?

We can easily agree with Paul Kingsnorth (see link, 16:09) that global warming is not a 'problem' for which we need to find a 'solution'. It is "rather a challenge to our whole way making sense", both of ourselves and the world (as Bateson would have told us).

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In thinking out loud about how the Dark Mountain movement instigated by them has developed over 5 years (2014-19), the authors see their success in having created a community which is okay with questioning its own narratives, not only the error of conceiving of nature as 'out there'. If one extends this view of nature to **human nature**, it becomes easy to turn human contributors, increasingly an adjunct to technology, into organizational fuel which one can "burn out" (link, 20:20).

This view of 'human resources' leads me to thinking of CDF, the Constructive Developmental Framework, with regard to the civilisatory crisis we are in. This crisis is not just one of the untruth of 'progress'; it is also one of the untruth of how organizations still conceive of their contributors, namely as **trainable energy sources (whose motivation is in doubt).**

This anachronistic conception of human nature is linked to the fact that it is organizational cultures that – intentionally or unintentionally – reduce homo sapiens to a trainable energy source (a kind of psychological fossil fuel). This shows me that the contemporary concept of 'human resources' is deeply pernicious, even for the sake of organizations themselves. It is a reduction of human nature that makes sure that they only get what they expect, not what they could get if they knew about adult development over the life span.

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In CDF, the notion of 'human resources' is that they are grounded in adult development over the lifespan which has a social-emotional, cognitive, and psychological – if not also a 'spiritual' – dimension, and that only a culture that is truly "dialogical" can bring out the best of such resources.

By "dialogical" is meant that the optimal way of using human resources is to honor their capability to construct the world, including their work, according to the momentary level of adult development they are presently "on", and that their potential – their own developmental

resources -- can best be brought to light by engaging them in a dialogue grounded in their awareness of themselves as yearning for self-development.

Clearly, this is not what organizations are created for. However, it could for them become a MEANS of reaching their optimal performance and value-add …

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In a book entitled "Practices of Dynamic Collaboration", by Jan De Visch and myself, we are using Bhaskar's theory of Moments of Dialectic and Basseches' theory of Thought Forms – united in DTF -- to show what meeting with people on the level of their present self-awareness means for, and in, different organizational practices such as performance management, planning, work design and others. We claim that the success of all these practices hinges on developing a dialogical culture that brings out contributors' development of self-awareness.

The important connection with that claim to the Dark Mountain Manifesto is a psychological one: if I begin to see my professional work in relation to the ecological crisis and threatening economic collapse we are now in, the optimal "life after warming" (Wallace-Wells 2019), thus my own development as an adult, can move to the center of my attention.

Standing in that center, I will be sensing that I am actually fortunate to partake, in my lifetime, of an existential threat that challenges me to move to the forefront of my own potential development, and that of those I work with, rather than aiming for nothing more than a good salary.

I cannot think of a stronger impetus for engaging in dialogue, which is a 'grown-up' way of creating world together, rather than 'scoring points' in debate. In the situation we are in, *debate* is 'out of proportion' with the seriousness of the issues we are facing, as Paul Kingsnorth rightfully maintains (link 45:55).