Introduction

Eight years have elapsed since the publication of Roy Bhaskar’s *Dialectic*. The stated aim of this project was extraordinarily ambitious. This was, basically, threefold. First, the ‘dialectical enrichment and deepening of critical realism – understood as consisting of transcendental realism as a general theory of science and critical naturalism as a special theory of social science’. Second, ‘the development of a general theory of dialectic . . . which will . . . be capable of sustaining the development of a general metatheory for the social sciences, on the basis of which they will be capable of functioning as agencies of human self-emancipation’. Third, ‘the outline of the elements of a totalising critique of western philosophy, in its various (including hitherto dialectical) forms . . . [that is] capable . . . of casting light on the contemporary crisis of socialism’.\(^1\) All of this was to be achieved primarily through the ‘non-preservative sublation of Hegelian dialectic’\(^2\) and the preservative sublation

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\(^1\) Bhaskar 1993, p. 2.  
\(^2\) Bhaskar 1993, p. xiii.
of Marxian dialectic. Bhaskar’s *Dialectic* thus offered the prospect of providing ‘a philosophical basis for Marxian social theory consistent with Marx’s own undeveloped methodological insights’\(^3\) and of philosophically under-labouring a genuinely emancipatory socialist political project.

Given the scope of the ambition of *Dialectic* (in terms of politics and philosophy), and given that it was intended to clarify Bhaskar’s relationship to Marxism, drawing up a balance sheet of the respective merits and demerits of the new dialectical critical realism (DCR) system introduced by Bhaskar in *Dialectic* is long overdue. This is the task of the current undertaking. This will entail addressing two kinds of issues. First, the issue of whether the DCR system of *Dialectic* overreaches and transcends Bhaskar’s earlier critical realism (CR) system, and the adequacy of Bhaskar’s dialectical concepts. Second, the issue of the nature of the relationship between Marxism and Bhaskar’s dialectic. Here, I will consider the following questions. Does Bhaskar’s DCR amount to a ‘transcendence’ or ‘outflanking’ (albeit sublative) of Marxian dialectic? Is DCR indispensable to Marxism for the formal specification of its dialectics? Or is Bhaskar’s dialectic better understood as simply the systematic specification, refinement and development of Marxian dialectic, a legitimate extension and deepening of Marxian dialectic?

The broad argument pursued here can be summarised as follows. First, although Bhaskar’s DCR system is a qualitative advance on his earlier CR system, and although it undoubtedly offers important insights for Marxism, it neither outflanks nor transcends Marxian dialectic, but is rather dependent on it, and often in unacknowledged ways. Second, despite the considerable merits of Bhaskar’s dialectic, its explanatory and critical edge is considerably blunted by a range of conceptual ambiguities, problems and defects, at least some of which are not shared by classical Marxian dialectic.

It is these which problematise any interpretation of Bhaskar’s DCR as a ‘new beginning’ for Marxism. Yet this is not to say that the broader Bhaskarian project of specifying a defensible realist philosophy is not of fundamental relevance to Marxism. Bhaskar’s central concepts of stratification and emergence, which undergo further development in his DCR system, do allow of a productive solution to some major dilemmas of Marxist thought (such as the relationship between freedom and necessity, voluntarism and deter-

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