

most of the gains of social democracy when it suited it to do so. It is because social democracy, even in its heyday, did not transform the most causally powerful structure that its amelioration of states of affairs, which was real enough, was so fragile. Furthermore the achievements of social democracy belong to the past. The transformation of the capitalist economic structure from a national to a global one has reduced the scope for amelioration of states of affairs by elected governments almost to vanishing point. Consequently, the Blair government is in a profound sense Thatcherite, just as the MacMillan and Heath governments were Attleeite. So Geoff Hodgson's Note 12 evoking the benefits of Roman rule in *The Life of Brian* rings rather hollow now: apart from de-nationalizing the Bank of England and cutting single parents' benefits, what has New Labour done for us? My point of course is not that Blair is a shmuck but that the economic structure sets constraints on what can be done, that it can be transcended only by transforming that structure.

reply

Geoffrey M. Hodgson

Andrew Collier's Promised Land

I am very grateful to Andrew Collier for his thoughtful reply. He seems to concede much of my case, accepting that 'critical realism by itself has no policy implications'. He even admits that critical realism's particular 'emancipatory' claims are 'vague'. He openly concedes that the claim that human emancipation can only take the form of socialism 'follows, not from critical realism itself', but from Marxism. But he then goes on to argue that critical realism, combined with some 'empirical claims', does have socialist implications.

However, while arguments about policy issues are important, they are of little relevance to the central argument in my essay. The argument there is *not* whether emancipation is possible or impossible, or whether socialism is desirable or possible, or whether social democracy is flawed or otherwise. *The argument is whether policy statements on these matters flow directly from critical realism.* In response, Andrew suggests that such policies do flow from critical realism when 'empirical claims' are added, as magic ingredients, to the stew.

Andrew accepts that 'critical realism does not by itself entail a socialist conclusion'. He then adds: 'that does not mean that it cannot enter into arguments for socialism'. Andrew then engages in such arguments. My question is this: is it Andrew or critical realism that is 'entering in' here. As far as I can see, it is not the doctrine of critical realism that enters. It is the socialist Andrew, who happens to be a critical realist. Andrew makes no effort in his reply to show that his own preferred policy position flows from his critical realist philosophy.

Andrew says that he concentrates on politics 'because that is where the real disagreement' lies. However, our differences on politics are not the central issue of debate here.

Political pluralism

I have inevitably concentrated on points about politics because that is where the real disagreement lies. But to return to the relation between critical realism and politics, the situation is nothing like so monolithic as Geoff Hodgson makes out. He himself exempts Margaret Archer and Tony Lawson from some of his strictures, and they are leading figures in the critical realist movement; there are critical realists in the Labour Party, the Green Party, the Socialist Workers' Party and no doubt other parties, and that is as it should be; there are critical realists who are Catholics, Protestants, atheists and Transcendental Meditators, and that is as it should be; there are critical realists, for example Andrew Sayer, who have criticized Roy Bhaskar's and my views on human emancipation, from inside the movement, and that is as it should be; but Roy and I do hold socialist views, and don't always keep them quiet when we are writing about critical realism, and that, too, is as it should be.

The debate is about whether specific policy claims can be drawn out of critical realism. I am not saying that anyone should keep their political views quiet. On the contrary. What I do ask is that when claims are made that critical realism leads to specific policy outcomes then such claims should be substantiated. So far, they have not.

Andrew makes a number of important but undeveloped and unsubstantiated socialistic claims. He takes us through a whole series of – at best marginal to the argument – policy issues, including the virtues of the best form of socialism and the vices of the Blair government. The chief merit of all this policy discussion is that Andrew, seemingly alone among critical realists, does – albeit very briefly – try to define what 'socialism' is.

What Andrew fails to demonstrate is that his now emerging position on the shape of his desired socialism has anything to do with his critical realism. He fails to demonstrate how *critical realism* shows that democratic socialism is possible. It may, or may not, be possible. But critical realism does not inform us either way. The reason for this is simple. To date, there is no critical realist account of the detailed structure and economic workings of a socialist system. To date, there is no critical realist evaluation of the Austrian theoretical claim that meaningful economic calculation under socialism is impossible.

Mention of John O'Neill's important book *The Market* (Routledge, 1998) does not help Andrew's case. In his book, O'Neill makes no reference to critical realism and it does not explicitly build on critical realism.

I have discussed these issues elsewhere. In my recent book *Economics and Utopia* (Routledge, 1999) I evaluate both the strengths and the limits of the Austrian School claims of von Mises and Hayek, and discuss the possibili-

ty or otherwise of different forms of socialism, including the role of the market therein. If the reader is interested, he or she may consult my book. I do not need to repeat myself here because it would not bear directly on the question of what policies flow directly from critical realism.

I shall now reply briefly to some of Andrew's specific points. My space is limited, so I have to be brief.

Selected Brief Responses to Some Specific Points

1. I do not suggest that 'because critical realists have not refuted Hayek they have not refuted any of the arguments against socialism'. There are many non-Hayekian arguments against socialism, some of which have been refuted. What I do suggest is that the Bhaskar-Collier claim that the 'possibility of a form of socialism' is demonstrated by critical realism must answer the Austrian critique. Furthermore, as yet, critical realism has not addressed these Austrian arguments, even when it has produced scholarly work on Hayek.
2. I do not suggest that 'markets and command economies are ... the only possible contenders'. It is a major argument in my *Economics and Utopia* that the contenders are not confined to two. Not only are different post-capitalist systems possible but there are different types of capitalism. The number of contenders is infinite.
3. Contrary to Collier and Marx, I do not believe that 'providing detailed blueprints' pre-empts 'the freedom of future generations'. On the contrary, it might help to show what feasible options are available. This tired old Marxist argument against utopian proposals does not work. In fact it provides a lame excuse for supporting 'socialism' without explaining in detail how socialism would function in political and economic terms.
4. Andrew indeed considers the constraints of capitalism, but unless he or others give a detailed account of the structures and workings of socialism then we have no grounds for presuming that socialist constraints are more or less pressing than capitalist ones. In none of his published works does Andrew give us such a detailed account. He simply takes the issue for granted. I stand by this 'extraordinary' statement.
5. Some (but not all) social-democratic governments may neglect the 'most causally powerful structure' of private property. But there is nothing in critical realism to tell us how to rank the causal powers of different types of social structure. It is Marxism that does this ranking for Andrew, not his critical realism.
6. Symptomatically, some political parties are missing from Andrew's list. Are there no critical realists in the Liberal Democratic Party, the Conservative Party, the Scottish National Party, Plaid Cymru, the Ulster Unionists, the British National Party, or the National Front? In truth there is nothing in critical realist philosophy that would rule out any such doctrinal affiliations.

Critical Realism and the Magic Ingredient

I now turn to Andrew's substantive theoretical claim, that critical realism '*combined with certain empirical claims*

has political implications'. He gives some examples of alleged 'empirical claims'. These include:

- capitalism is exploitative
- commercially-driven technology is threatening life on Earth, and
- Guild Socialism provided a possible blueprint of a socialist system.

Whatever we may wish to say about these claims, they are not merely empirical. The first involves a *definition* and a *theory* of exploitation, as well as the empirical fact of profit. It is also involves a *value-judgement*. The second involves a *theory* of systemic interactions between the capitalist economy and the ecosystem, as well as a huge amount of relevant empirical data. The third claim must involve elements of political and economic *theory*, concerning decision-making and other mechanisms of production, distribution and exchange.

Andrew does not say that the claims are exclusively empirical, but on the other hand he does not admit their theoretical and normative dimensions. On reflection he might well admit these. So where does that leave us? I make two tenable assertions:

First, if critical realism plus the 'magic ingredients' can lead to specific policy claims then these added ingredients can never be simply 'empirical claims'. For a 'quick move' from critical realism to policy issues, substantial theoretical and normative claims must be added as well. These additional claims need not themselves flow from critical realism. All attempts at such a 'quick move' by critical realists have involved substantial theoretical and normative claims that do not themselves emanate from critical realist philosophy.

Second, critical realism does not itself rule out alternative so-called 'empirical claims' that would lead to very different and non-socialist policy conclusions. For example, empirical, theoretical and normative claims may be made on the following lines:

- that most domestic and employment structures involve male domination over women;
- that these male-dominated structures stimulate mental illness in women and stunt female intellectual and personal development;
- that men are now economically redundant, as all jobs can be done at least as well by women;
- that male penetration subjugates women and that better female sexual satisfaction can be obtained from elsewhere;
- and that all male sperm should be frozen for future use, all men offered suicide pills, and all male foetuses aborted henceforth.

There is nothing in critical realism that prevents us reaching such policy conclusions. If my antagonist was an (imaginary) Andrea Clothier rather than the (very real) Andrew Collier then I might have had to discuss radical feminism rather than Marxist socialism. It was not critical realist philosophy that signposted us to our destination. It was something else besides.