

## Chapter Five      The Philosophy of meta-Reality

*Bhaskar's later work on critical realism took a spiritual turn, focussing on the ontology of persons and suggesting that we have a ground state of unity, love and spontaneous right action that connects us to all other beings. His philosophy of meta-Reality suggests that we are currently cut off or 'split' from this ground state by the alienation, illusions, and disempowerment caused by current social structures. Reconnecting to our ground state and thereby realising a higher moral state of being (non-duality), is key to developing empathy and solidarity with others, the re-enchantment of the world, the realisation of radical global citizenship, and social emancipation. School geography can aid the development of non-dual beings in ways that this chapter outlines.*

The preface outlined the three phases of Bhaskar's development of critical realism. In the first phase, basic critical realism, he asked what must the world be like for science to exist? In the second phase, dialectical critical realism, he asked what connects structure, agency and causation to change in a dynamic world? In the third phase, the philosophy of meta-Reality (PMR), he asked what must the world be like for us to live in a state of freedom? This later work took a spiritual turn as he focussed on the ontology of persons, their realised and unrealised levels of existence, and their fulfilled and unfulfilled powers, potentialities, or capabilities. While basic and dialectical critical realism under labour for the sciences, PMR under labours for religion.

Bhaskar viewed reality as a hierarchy with three layers or realms [1]:

- **Absolute Reality (Non-duality/Ground State):** This is the foundational underlying level of existence, often referred to as the ground state of being. It is the level of 'transcendental agency' or the true self which is interconnected with all other beings and the cosmos. It is the source from which we can act to change the world through it is usually hidden by our self-centred everyday perceptions.
- **Relative Reality (Duality):** This is the world of everyday life, characterised by duality – the distinction between self and other, subject and object. While it contains elements of illusion, it is not purely false. It is the 'site of struggle' where we operate, learn, and try to bring our lives into alignment with the absolute non-dual ground state. It is the space

between the absolute and demi-real where we can experience both connection and separation.

- **Demi-Reality (Demi-real):** This represents a ‘half-real’ illusory or distorted view of reality. It is the realm of alienation, ego, hatred, and deep-seated social contradictions. It is sustained by TINA (There Is No Alternative) compromise formations – the idea that our current often oppressive social and personal conditions are the only way things can be. It is a parasite on the absolute, depends on the truth it suppresses, and is ‘real’ in that it has affects, but is ‘false’ because it is a distortion of our true non-dual nature.

While demi-realities are ‘false’ at the level of absolute reality, they generate powerful, real-world effects. Systemic racism and right populism for example, are ‘false’ constructs but they have profound impacts on people’s lives. Hence, while humans often feel ‘split’ or alienated (the relative reality of everyday life and interaction), their fundamental nature is non-dual. Bhaskar’s termed demi-reality a ‘slice of the reality’ that seizes the individual and masquerades as the entire truth’.

**Universal self-realisation** is the process of shedding the constraints of demi-reality so that we can act in accordance with our non-dual nature and our ground state. This involves **transcendental identification or meditation** whereby we become co-present with the rest of human and non-human nature. This requires and fosters universal solidarity as reflected in the Earth Charter and other ethical principles designed to ensure human well-being and free flourishing. PMR suggests that education should nurture students’ internal capacity to recognise and realise their transcendental real self, connect with their ground state, and become a radical global citizen committed to the flourishing of others, including non-human beings.

### **Spirituality, self-transcendence, and humanity’s ground state**

Bhaskar believed that while we currently live in a world characterised by unhappiness, oppression, conflict and alienation, it is nevertheless sustained by a ground state, foundation or spiritual substrate of non-duality which PMR seeks to describe. Spirituality enables access to this ground state in which principles of reciprocity, solidarity and trust hold sway. Our ground state prompts non-instrumental reasoning, unconditional love, spontaneous creativity, and can be accessed and applied to resolve conflicts, guide decision making, and allow us to

overcome dualisms. The related concept of **co-presence** is a mechanism of identification in which we come to see that the other (other human and non-human beings) as not distinct or distant but something with which we have reciprocal relations and with which we identify empathetically and transcendentally. Recognising ourselves as non-dual beings (at one with ourselves, others, and the rest of nature, adopting shared interests, and having no ego) is a necessary step to our emancipation from oppressive social structures and our becoming radical global citizens. Bhaskar believed that is by realising non-duality that the moral evolution of humanity can be continued.

The philosophy of [meta-Reality](#) [2] (the zone of non-duality) seeks to increase the cultural resources of emancipatory movements by exploring a non-institutional, non-religious spirituality that develops [self-transcendence](#) [3], is ‘maximally inclusive’ and is likely to appeal both to atheists and those of faith. If we are to live as fully capable citizens in a sustainable society, this non-dual zone needs to be expanded by getting rid of everything that is inconsistent with the creative, loving and free natures of human beings. Bhaskar summed up PMR in this way:

*“The philosophy of meta-Reality describes the way in which this very world nevertheless depends upon, that is, is ultimately sustained by and exists only in virtue of the free, loving, creative, intelligent energy and activity of non-dual states of our being and phases of our activity. In becoming aware of this we begin the process of transforming and overthrowing the totality of structures of oppression, alienation, mystification and misery we have produced; and the vision opens up of a balanced world and of a society in which the free development and flourishing of each unique human being is understood to be the condition, as it is also the consequence, of the free development and flourishing of all.”* ([Bhaskar 2012: vii](#)) [4]

Appeals to our ground state are found in the fields of commerce, religion, politics, public relations, charity, and education. By appealing to associated emotions, values, feelings or affects, actors and institutions seek to win our support. Radical global citizenship is the goal of populist left parties and radical NGOs that campaign on issues of the environment and development. Their agendas can be considered to align with the objectives of PMR.

## **The objectives of PMR**

The [Roy Bhaskar Centre](#) [5] lists the objectives of PMR:

1. To promote critical religious literacy, understanding and tolerance.
2. To challenge the taboo on talking about the spiritual which left religion with a near monopoly on the topic, thus articulating a spirituality that would not be hostage to institutionalised religion.
3. To critique much actually existing religiosity and its organisational forms, since “Religion includes much that is false in its teaching and, as a social institution, much that is oppressive and exploitative, mired in the wider context of master–slave-type social relations”.
4. To promote the idea that it is only when human beings can both see themselves - and act as - a contingently emergent part of the cosmic totality, in no way split off from it, that we can achieve universal flourishing. That is, we need to overcome dualisms and alienation.

It is PMR’s focus on spirituality, transcendental thinking, and seeing ourselves as a contingent emergent part of the cosmic totality that are most relevant to geographical education. Spirituality, transcendental identification, and self-transcendence enable the learner to experience a ‘oneness’ with nature, place, and ‘the cosmic totality’ that has the potential to overcome duality (alienation, separation, ‘split’) and is key to the realisation of such ethical principles as those in the Earth Charter along with radical democracy and citizenship. Related pedagogy, that also draws on basic and dialectical critical realism (chapters 1 to 4), encourages students to move beyond self-centred concerns, develop universal solidarity with others, and so develop moral autonomy, political literacy, and radical global citizenship.

### **Principles of universal solidarity and axial rationality**

We met dualism in previous chapters together with critical realism’s desire to adopt a both/and rather than an either/or approach to them. At the macro level dualisms include reductionism vs holism, society vs nature, subject vs object, and structure vs agency. At the micros level they include mind vs body, and fact vs value (head vs heart). Such dualisms emerged with modernity and modern thought and are a target of critical social theory which suggests that modernity’s promise of enlightenment has not been fulfilled due to these dualisms and the associated rise of instrumental reason (based on empiricism and positivism) and growing individualism, egocentricity, or selfishness. Such selfishness, now

fostered by neoliberal capitalism and such discourses as disaster nationalism, lies at the core of the current global crisis as explored in chapter two.

Bhaskar's solution to egocentricity is to promote through PMR the principles of universal solidarity and axial rationality. He argues that humans can be better than they are and that they should aim to realise a state in which they recognise that the other as not simple something they could have been but as part of themselves and who they are. This requires them to transcendentally identify with the rest of creation or the cosmos. Bhaskar uses the term 'cosmic envelope' to denote the connectedness of all beings and the need for universal solidarity. Some draw comparisons with ecocentrism and ecological ethics while others suggest that he uses the term to replace the concept of God. As we saw in chapter four, universal solidarity is central to the critical theory and practice of education of sustainable development and global citizenship that develops learners' capabilities to empathise with and exercise responsibility for others, including those distant in space and time.

Axial rationality refers to a reasoned disposition to rationally prefer one description of reality over another based on its explanatory power. It is a central component of critical realism's epistemology and methodology that we examined in chapters two and three,

### **Non-duality**

Bhaskar was influenced by Eastern philosophies and an experience of transcendence (a non-dual state) or enlightenment. He recognised that in such moments we are in resonance with our ground state which has always been, and has never not been, enlightened. In this state we realise that all is one, that everything is part of everything else, that we are non-dual beings, that we do not need priests or mystics to achieve self-realisation, and that non-duality is already an accessible part of our being. Realising and acting in accordance with humanity's ground state is more basic than adopting a particular religious or political standpoint and is key to both self-realisation and social transformation on all four planes of social being. Only when we can see ourselves and act as an emergent part of the cosmic totality, in no way split off from other sentient beings, can we achieve universal flourishing and realise such principles as those in the Earth Charter.

Non-duality is a state of being that involves moving beyond oneself and entering something that is not you. It occurs when we really listen to someone else, when

we read a book, watch a film or engage with nature and place. It is not just an eastern spiritual metaphor for being enlightened but is a real thing, an intransitive causal power that when actualised transitively allows both persons and persons and the rest of nature to truly meet and recognise their shared interests.

PMR calls on us to be more than we are, to do the work of not only freeing ourselves but all sentient beings. Linked to environmental ethics and sustainability, it insists that we are of the world and in the world and as such we need to protect the world. It makes room for western and eastern philosophies, for a pluriverse of transformative knowledges including critical Indigenous, humanistic and eco-centric geographies. Thereby it challenges colonial and other exclusions.

### **What self-transcendence or non-duality involves**

[Akerman](#) [6] provides characteristics of self-transcendence that ensure ‘you know it when you see it’.

1. A shift in focus from the self to others – this shift from selfishness and egoism to consideration of the needs of others is a marker of self-transcendence and is the most salient and important feature.
2. A shift in values – those who have achieved self-transcendence no longer find themselves driven by extrinsic motivation, or external rewards and demands, but by intrinsic motivation (the reward for an activity is the activity itself).
3. An increase in moral concern – self-transcendence brings with it a more intensive focus on doing what is right.
4. Emotions of elevation – these experiences of higher-order emotions can be triggered by all three of the characteristics described above; the emotions include awe, ecstasy, amazement, feeling uplifted, feeling elevated, etc.

He explains that ‘if you know anyone who is constantly working to meet the needs of less fortunate others, who is driven not by money or rewards but by an internal drive and is always concerned with doing the right thing, you likely have an example of self-transcendence right in front of you!’

### **Hartmut Rosa’s concept of resonance**

In [this video](#), [7] the social theorist Rosa explains his concept of resonance that has strong similarities with Bhaskar's concept of non-duality. He explains that capitalism is experiencing a period of acceleration linked to digital technology and that this creates alienation as people lose touch with one another and the rest of nature and fail to fully understand what is going on. His solution to our predicament is to advocate resonance, the opposite of alienation and the most important or basic mode of being human. This way of relating to the world involves being truly aware of one's environment, reaching out and sensing what it has to offer, and engaging in self-transformation, a result of self-transcendence.

Examples of resonance he gives include deep conversation, listening to music, meaningful work, and reading philosophy. All require us to lose ourselves in or identify with the other and stimulate psychic energy which can also be derived from working with others in political parties and social movements to create a less alienating (more democratic, just and sustainable and so more meaningful) world. Rosa argues that resonance collapses such dualisms as input/output, passive/active, subject/object, and being/having, and that we should reconnect with and learn from the non-dual knowledges of indigenous / traditional cultures and Eastern religions. The [Resonant Computing Manifesto](#) [8] borrows its thinking about resonance from the field of architecture and the built environment.

### **Romanticism and realism**

Bhaskar's concept of non-duality and Rosa's notion of resonance can be seen as attempts to resolve the tension within modern thought between romanticism and realism. The [english12review website](#) [9] sums up these two currents in modern thought by stating that 'while Romanticism emphasizes emotion, imagination, and the glorification of nature and individualism, Realism focuses on depicting everyday life, society, and human experiences in a truthful and objective manner.' It reminds us that these currents represent differing perspectives on life and art (geography and the environment), with realism seeking to portray reality as it is, often highlighting social issues, while romanticism seeks to transcend reality through idealisation and emotional depth. While romanticism informs progressive, student centred theories of education, realism informs mainstream / liberal theories.

Against this background PMR can be seen as an attempt to close the duality between romanticism and realism and add a spiritual dimension to critical realism and socially critical education while rejecting idealism (page one). For school

geography this means paying more attention to forms of knowledge that reject both the epistemological and ontological hegemonies of modern thought. These transformative knowledges are critical in that they are compatible with a critical realist philosophy of knowledge that BOTH reveals deep structures and processes at work in the world AND replaces dualism with non-dualism or holism.

### **MELDARA or the seven dimensions of being**

In the later phases of his work Bhaskar used the acronym MELDARA to represent seven dimensions of being or stages in the dialectical process of human emancipation and self-realisation. This framework moves beyond the initial focus on the three domains of reality (real, actual and empirical) to a more integrated, dialectical and spiritual understanding of reality. A complex philosophical meta-theory, he intended it to provide a comprehensive, multi-dimensional understanding of reality, knowledge, and emancipation, and integrate his earlier work on critical realism with later ideas on dialectics and spirituality.

Something of the complexity of this meta-theory and its relevance for education can be grasped by watching Hawke's video on [education, creativity and PMR](#) [10] and reading chapter three in his [edited collection of Bhaskar's talks](#) [11]. After consulting these and other sources (including AI), I suggest that MELDARA can be related to stages in students' learning in the following way:

- **1M - First Moment (Non-Identity):** This represents "Transcendental Realism" or basic critical realism. Students accept that reality exists independently of our knowledge of it (intransitivity) and that there is a distinction between what we experience (empirical), what happens (actual), and the underlying mechanisms that cause events (real).
- **2E - Second Edge (Negativity):** This stage introduces the concepts of absence, negativity, and change. Students accept that absences (e.g., lack of food, absence of freedom) are real, causal, and essential to understanding reality, opposing the idea that reality is purely positive.
- **3L - Third Level (Totality):** This level introduces "Dialectical Critical Realism" (DCR). Students view reality as a complex, interconnected, and holistic system (totality), where parts are internally related to the whole, rather than just being externally connected.
- **4D - Fourth Dimension (Transformative Praxis):** This stage emphasizes human agency and transformative praxis— students reflect and act on the

ability of humans to consciously act, change, and transform social structures (Four-Planar Social Being).

- **5A - Fifth Aspect (Reflexivity/Spirituality):** This represents the shift towards **meta-reality**, where students understand reflexivity as a deeper form of spirituality. They explore the inward, subjective, and personal dimension of being.
- **6R - Sixth Realm (Re-enchantment):** This level explores the "re-enchantment" of the world. Students move away from a purely materialistic or secular view toward one that recognizes the spiritual, sacred, or "ground" of being.
- **7A - Seventh Awakening (Non-Duality):** This final level represents non-duality within meta-reality, where students overcome the separation between self and other, mind and body, or human and nature, paving the way for universal human flourishing.

Clearly progressing students through MELDARA's seven states or levels requires the integration of appropriate moral and political education within the geography curriculum. As regards moral education, you might consider the extent to which MELDARA is compatible with Bloom's taxonomy of objectives (especially [the affective domain](#)) [12], with [Kohlberg's stages of moral development](#) [13] or [Malow's hierarchy of needs](#) [14].

### **PMR's ground state, ecocentrism and sustainability discourse**

By suggesting that self-transcendence prompts us to recognise our potential as non-dual beings, capable of unconditional love of others and having the creativity to produce a more sustainable world, Bhaskar invites consideration of corresponding environmental ethics and politics. PMR supports [ecocentrism](#) [15] that views humankind as part of a global ecosystem and subject to ecological laws. These laws prompt an ecologically based morality that constrains human action, particularly through imposing limits to economic growth or pursuing policies of degrowth. Ecocentrism incorporates strong respect for nature in its own right (its intrinsic value) and Table 4.2, page 100 illustrates the role it plays in the transformative story of sustainability. Ecocentrism is a feature of [eco-socialism](#) [16], [eco-fascism](#) [17], the transformative knowledges (Figure 2.8, page 50), green left populism (a green democratic revolution), the knowledges of the powerless, and related counter-hegemony. [Technocentrism](#) [18] is a feature of

mainstream politics, right populism, the knowledges of the powerful, and the dominant neoliberal hegemony. It exists in unregulated and reformed version, with the latter associated with ecological modernisation, sustainable development, and the ‘greening of capitalism’.

A caution is perhaps needed here. Bhaskar is not advocating nature worship of the kind associated with new ageism and some counter-cultural sects. Nature is contradictory, BOTH benign AND ‘red in tooth and claw’. While non-dual beings recognise the need to study bio-physical / ecological systems and live according to ecological laws, they also recognise that humans are BOTH part of AND apart from nature. They are animals, but unique animals in terms of their powers. They alone are the originators of values. Human intellect, creativity, technology, and politics provide them with options as to how they define and seek to realise sustainability. They bestow economic, aesthetic, existence, intrinsic, religious, spiritual, and other values on nature, to varying extents at varying times, but these are all human values and are incorporated in different ways into environmental and sustainability discourses. PMR is BOTH ecocentric AND homocentric, an expression of [ecological humanism](#) [19] that is associated with such forms of political economy as eco-socialism or eco-Marxism (see chapter one ).

### **Michael Bonnett, environmental consciousness and sustainability as a frame of mind**

[Bonnett](#) is an environmental philosopher whose writing on environmental consciousness and sustainability as a frame of mind, leads to recommendations for environmental education that accord with PMR’s attention to self-transcendence and non-duality (see [Huckle, 2006](#), [20] p. 18 on sustainability as a frame of mind). By drawing on phenomenology he analyses our experiences of transcendence when encountering nature as a woodland or upland stream. In such places, he argues, we are held in the transcendental powers that permeate them, can enclose us in their non-duality, and enable us to connect to what Bhaskar terms our ground state. Such encounters reveal nature to be normative (establishing norms, standards or values for human life), capable of expanding our consciousness, and binding us to the rest of nature in ways that science cannot. In such places we experience both birth and death, both growth and decay, both lightening and darkening, both sound and silence, both motion and stillness that remind us that nature is non-dual. Transcendent experience grounds us ontologically, anchoring us in place and reminding us of the deep structures and process that shape our world (the real domain), our sense of identity, who we are,

and what we are should and should not do. Nature can be said to ‘speak to us’ and remind us of our duty of care as summarised in Earth Charter principles.

Phenomenological speculation about encounters with nature, leads Bonnett to outline two modes of thinking about nature or two forms of environmental consciousness. The dominant or hegemonic form is technocentric and represents a ‘metaphysics of mastery’ over nature, the counter-hegemonic form is ecocentric and in Bonnett’s words ‘realist but not materialist in conventional terms’ (p. . These are summarised in Table 5.1

Technocentric consciousness	Ecocentric consciousness
Objects described and classified in terms of category membership e.g. a tree’s species, shape, fruit, height, economic value. Uniqueness and mysteriousness erased.	Objects conceived as uniquely occurring in place, defying classification, and consisting of mutually sustaining fluid relations with other objects.
Nature set up for inspection, use and commodification,	Nature as spontaneity, inescapable otherness and mystery.
Nature known through calculation and scientism.	Nature known (always incompletely) by acquaintance rather than calculation.
Things in nature are to be controlled, mastered, colonised, and exploited to meet human needs and wants.	Things in nature can ‘speak to us’, imparting something of their own integrity.
Deeply anthropocentric and manipulative. Nature the object of technological fixes.	We can gain insights into what counts as their wellbeing and fulfilment. In this sense they are experienced as normative (expressing how things should be, rightness) and possessing intrinsic value.
Sustainability as balancing economic growth, social justice, and environmental protection.	Intrinsic value in nature prompts notions of ecological justice, the rights of non-human nature and consideration of its needs in human decision-making.
Sustainability requires ecological modernisation or the ‘greening of capitalism’.	Sustainability as a frame of mind attentive to nature’s voice and intrinsic, ‘sacred’ value.
Sustainable development as part of liberal global citizenship.	Sustainability requires us to adopt a reflexive environmental consciousness or frame of mind that lets things be true to their inherent otherness, mystery, and being.
	Sustainability as part of radical global citizenship

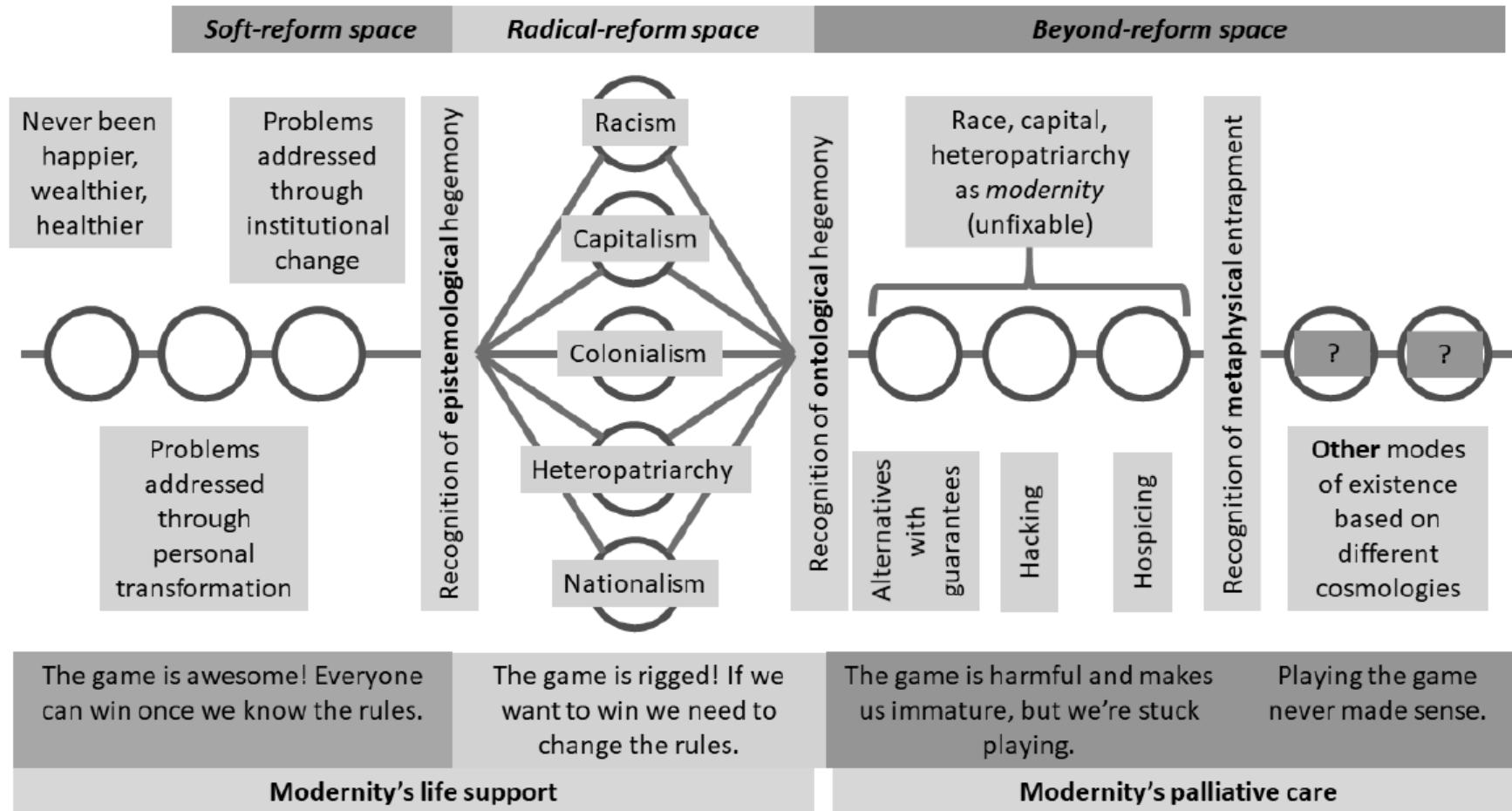
Figure 5.1 **Two forms of environmental consciousness** ([Based on Bonnett, 2021 \[21\]](#))

## The Gesturing Towards Decolonial Futures Collective and Global Citizenship Education Otherwise

Having explored how PMR takes us into the realm of non-dual knowledges regarding the environment and sustainability, we now turn to global citizenship and the ways in which it too can be theorised in non-dual ways to accommodate Bhaskar's concept of humanity's ground state. Clearly unconditional love of 'the other' and universal solidarity are foundations of global citizenship, and these qualities of our ground state serve as foundations for advocacy of such citizenship (see for example [Oxfam](#) [22]).

Drawing on earlier work by Andreotti (2014) that explores the root narratives or discourses underlying different approaches to development education and global citizenship education (GCE), the [Gesturing Towards Decolonial Futures Collective](#) [23] has drawn on decolonial theory to develop an approach to GCE that it labels 'otherwise'. Its [study guide to this approach](#) [24] provides cartographies and pedagogical tools to enable learners to activate their ground state or 'inner compass' by engaging with modern illusions and denials; facing their complicity with harm; retiring old habits of knowing and being; and nurturing new forms of co-existence and political possibilities (Amsler, 2019, Stein et al, 2020).

Cartography 3 (Figure 5.2) from the study guide, recognises soft reform, radical reform and beyond reform spaces as responses to the crises of modernity explored in other cartographies. Soft reform involves changing what we do (methodological or technocratic / technocentric fixes; problem solving within prevailing political economy; the greening of capitalism, positivism). Radical reform involves changing how we do it (going beyond epistemological hegemony, recognising alternative forms of political economy; the greening of socialism, critical social theory). Beyond reform involves challenging basic assumptions about the world and our place within it (going beyond ontological hegemony to explore 'other' ways of seeing, being and living in the world that involve spirituality and transcendence). Overcoming dualisms is central to the beyond reform space which leads via the recognition and rejection of metaphysical entanglement with modernity to the adoption of other modes of being based on different cosmologies.



## Figure 5.2 Cartography 3, Different approaches to reform with regard to modernity / coloniality ([25] page 51)

GTDF's study guide offers online resources to address three modern denials (denial of systemic and violent complicity in harm elsewhere; of planetary limits; and of entanglement in a cosmology of duality) and help learners to know, be, relate and desire differently. Its exercises are based on two strategies: use of social cartographies to explore and connect challenges and possible solutions; and the development of 'radical tenderness' (practicing resonance or transcendence). They seek the learner's recovery of exiled capacities and offer support for dealing with the circularities that draw learners back to what they seek to transcend and for hospicing their commitments to an unsustainable modernity. These exercises have considerable potential to enrich the geography and humanities curriculum when incorporated into radical democratic global citizenship education as does the collective's advocacy of place and land-based pedagogies that involve students in the regeneration of local ecological and cultural systems.

Having considered the relevance of PMR to sustainability and global citizenship, we now turn to geography and the interest of geographers in spirituality and [religion](#) [26].

### Geographies of spirituality

Geographies of spirituality explore the deep connection between place, landscape, and spiritual experience, and how locations shape beliefs, practices (like pilgrimage to sacred sites), and identity. They move beyond formal religion to include personal, everyday moments of wonder, connection, or meaning found in nature, cities, or even mundane journeys, and examine how spiritual ideas manifest in physical space (sacred mountains, temples, pure lands) and how features of modern life, like urbanisation, affects these spiritual geographies, creating both challenges and new forms of spiritual expression. Part of students' personal and everyday geographies, their subjective spiritual geographies consist of a network of meaningful time-spaces built through personal routines and associations that foster a sense of connection, awe, and responsibility towards the environment, the Earth, and other global citizens. They draw on and reflect society's cultural and religious diversity and may draw on religious and /or secular beliefs.

[Bartolini, Robert and Pile](#) [27] offer an overview of spiritual geographies noting that they research four kinds of geography: personal geographies, niche spaces that allow spiritual practices, retreats and spiritual communities, and transcendental spaces. Such geographies are also concerned with the occult and the paranormal that can be seen to question the view that modernity is free of divine, spiritual, mystical and supernatural ideas. Prime sites for witnessing and researching these ideas are within popular culture: cinema, music, television, theatre and fiction. These authors remind us that religion, science and superstition compete to occupy people's belief systems and conclude by questioning the duality that on the one hand there are religious spheres or discourses that are somehow un-modern and on the other hand there are spheres and discourse that are somehow free of spirit, superstition, magic and the like.

Indeed, religion, spirituality, superstition and magic can be considered the 'stuff' from which modernity has been built alongside reason and science. This view would seem to accord with PMR, seeing modernity as already enchanted, spiritual and magical, with expressions of the divine (our ground state) folded within it. Modernity is produced by and productive of all kinds of ideas about spirit (including PMR) and these inform people's everyday lives. It is the mundane geography of spirituality, 'of all the myriad things people have faith in and how those faiths weave in and out of their lives' that is currently lacking at a time when the boundary between the religious and non-religious is increasingly fuzzy and fluid.

### **PMR, spirituality and school geography**

As a means of summarizing and introducing resources that can assist teachers as they integrate PMR into a critical school geography, I suggest that it requires school geography to:

- Acknowledge the ontology of nature and persons, their emergence, agency, identity, mystery, and intrinsic value.
- Foster non-duality and non-dual personalities. The curriculum should be open to spirituality, the arts and humanities, and outdoor learning, as ways of re-enchanting the world and connecting students to the agency, significance, and needs of others. This requires attention to the [affective objectives of learning](#) [28] and pedagogies of co-presence (being together, co-location) that are currently neglected.

- Be consistent with ecocentrism and foster ecocentric consciousness (Table 5.1). It should question technocentrism, mastery of nature, and conventional notions of progress. It should explore degrowth and post-capitalism along with other forms of transformative knowledge and develop radical global citizens in ways that acknowledge that these knowledges challenge both the epistemological and ontological hegemonies of modern knowledge (the knowledge of the powerful, chapter two).
- Regard truth as an ontological notion that is interwoven with well-being. Something is true if it is mutually beneficial to people and the rest of nature (promotes human flourishing). Moral education through geography should focus on BOTH ecocentrism AND humanism, developing the capability of being able to discern and act on the truth (moral autonomy). It can be guided by the MELDARA scheme outlining seven dimensions of being.
- Draw on [humanistic geography](#) [29] and its rich insights into the meaning or phenomenology of nature, place, and consciousness.
- Accept that a pre-specified and ‘delivered’ curriculum can exclude an intimate ‘spiritual’ acquaintance with nature and others. It can alienate students from external nature, their own nature, and the natures of others. The alternative is a socially critical and democratic curriculum (page 42) that accommodates both scientific and spiritual worldviews. Students and teachers would decide content and pedagogy within a broad framework provided by national government and monitored by local government.
- Develop digital literacy in the knowledge that screens, social media, and virtual reality can serve BOTH limit AND enhance students’ attention to their ground state.
- Develop political and social literacy in ways that acknowledge both human and non-human structures and agency (see chapter four) and foster radical global citizenship. The curriculum should explore the ongoing need to remake the system of global governance in ways that render it an effective vehicle for diplomacy and multi-lateral action to address the global crisis and promote humanitarian and environmental stewardship.

## **Sources and resources relevant to the integration of PMR into school geography**

[Values and controversial issues](#) [30] is a page on the GA’s Learning to teach secondary geography menu. The Earth Charter’s principles can be seen as an

expression of this state and the [ECI website](#) [31] has related values education activities for working with them in the classroom. Elsewhere the literature on values and moral education that is relevant to geography teaching is extensive. See for example [Kowash and Lippe](#) [32] on moral impasses in sustainability education, [Narvaez](#) on moral education in a time of human ecological devastation, and [Stables](#) [33] on environmental ethics and ontologies. [Action competence](#) [34] is a theoretical concept that finds wider application in environmental education than it does school geography.

Geography teachers seeking to explore and build on students' personal spiritual geographies can co-operate with colleagues in the art, music, English and religious education departments who have an interest in fostering spirituality. They can teach about peoples, such as [Welsh druids](#) [35] or the [first peoples of Australia](#) [36], whose worldview encompasses non-duality and they can engage in fieldwork designed to stimulate self-transcendence and resonance, and combat [eco-anxiety](#) [37]. The Ramblers have a [masterclass on sensory walks](#) [38] in rural environments while the [Town and Country Planning Association](#) [39] has long encouraged sensory education linked to the built environment as part of urban environmental education. Park has a chapter on religion and geography in [The Routledge Companion to the Study of Religion](#) [40] and [Religions & Environments Educational Projects](#) [41] has resources on world religions and their beliefs about nature, Armstrong's book [Sacred Nature](#) [42] draws on world religions to argue that we need to rekindle our spiritual bond with nature while [Magee](#) [43] insists that to counter the rise of hate, empathy, or love of the other as preached by major world religions, should become a 'public practice woven into our schools, workplaces and laws'.

Geography teachers draw on resources provided by environment and development NGOs to foster empathy and solidarity with human and non-human nature elsewhere in the world. [Sustainability and Environmental Education, the Global Learning Network](#) [44], and [Ideas for Global Citizenship](#) [45] provide routes to these resources while [Unesco](#) [46] has guidance on global citizenship education. Referring back to Fraser and Cannibal Capitalism (pages 47 & 48) teachers should consider teaching about solidarity among workers (the [Transnational Institute](#) [47]), carers ([Carers Worldwide](#) [48]), and colonised peoples ([CounterCurrents](#) [49]) and their campaigns. These are covered by the alternative press and geography teachers can inform themselves and their students via radical publications, video channels and podcasts. [The New Internationalist](#) magazine [50], [Novara media](#) [51] and David Harvey's [Anti-Capitalist Chronicles](#) [52] are just three examples and radical teachers will be aware of many others.

To conclude this chapter, it is perhaps important to recap a requirement mentioned in the preface. Radical global citizens require a sound understanding of how the world currently works before they can consider reform or

transformation. This means that in the absence of adequate economic and political education elsewhere in the curriculum, geography teachers need to address the basics of capitalism, liberal democracy, [UK government](#) [53], [international law](#) [54], and [European](#) [55] and [global governance](#) [56]. A level geography [revision notes](#) [57] can be helpful here.

## Further reading

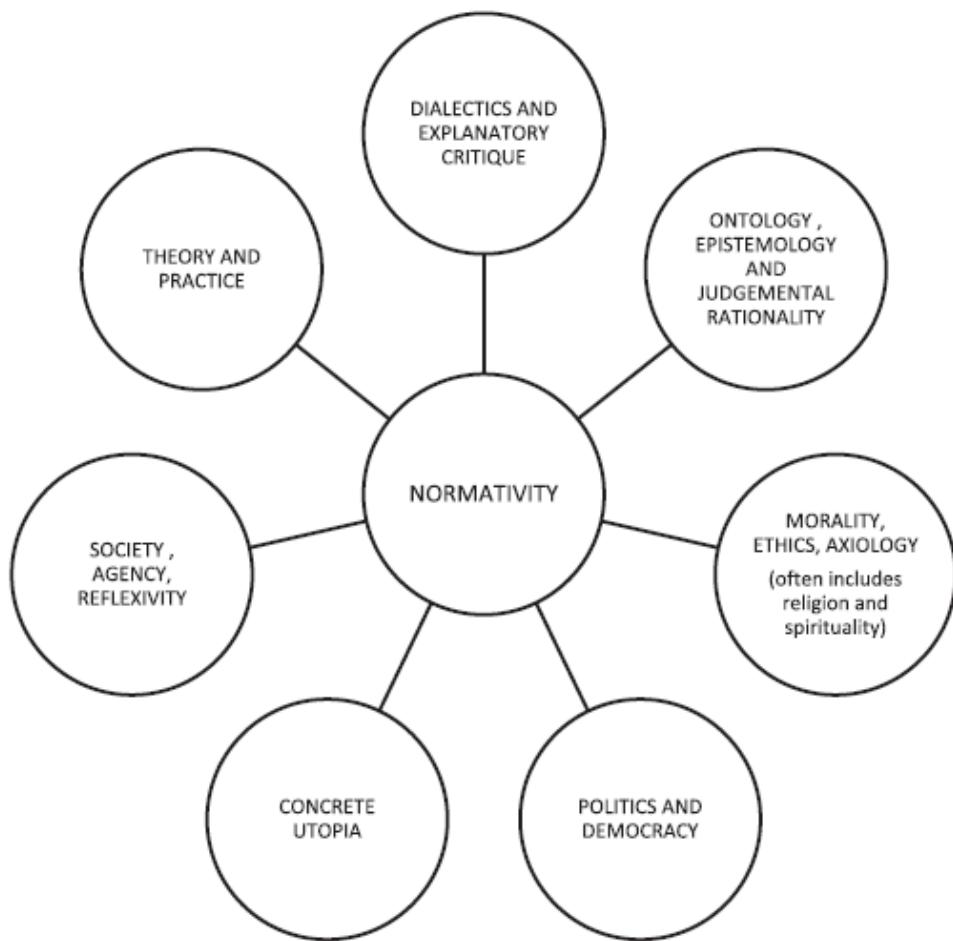
[Bhaskar](#) [58] suggests how critical realism might facilitate the understanding of persons and improve their lives. How does his article supplement your understanding of critical realism and PMR? What are the implications for school geography of his argument that ‘we should not see persons as Cartesian egos: subjects opposed to an object world, which includes other subjects. Rather we should approach the ontology of persons in terms of the thought embodied in some African languages by the notion of *ubuntu* which means roughly ‘*I am because you are*’.

In his [2002 lecture Educating the Educators](#) [59], Bhaskar argued ‘our goal as educators, self-educators, is to be party to a process of being and creating and helping beings help create themselves as non-dual beings in a world of duality’ (p. 312). He also argued that ‘each of us in our ground state is unique’ (p. 314) and that ‘non-duality does not mean that you stop fighting’ (p. 315). What needs to happen to school geography before it can claim to be helping students to become non-dual beings in touch with their ground state?

[Price](#) [60] introduces a special issue of the *Journal of Critical Realism* on normativity. Normativity refers to the concept of standards, rules, ideals or values that guide how things *ought* to be, influencing behaviour, judgments, and beliefs in moral, social, legal, and linguistic contexts.

Price suggests that there is still disagreement among critical realists ‘about how we decide what to value, that is what constitutes the good and what normative role, if any, this good should play in processes of democracy / social consensus’. He offers a figure that ‘refers to the sort of things that might be discussed by critical realists when considering the idea of normativity’.

How do the considerations outlined in Figure 5.3 shape critical realist debate about how we should teach geography to 14–18-year-olds on a finite planet? What does each consideration contribute to the debate? Which considerations offer the greatest challenge / opportunity to your current teaching of geography? Note degrowth society or radical ecological democracy can be considered examples of concrete utopias. There are others listed as transformative knowledges in Figure 2.8, page 50.



**Figure 5.3 Considerations often encountered in critical realist discussions about normativity [61]**

Price's article has a table comparing how the seven contributors seek to establish a moral baseline and thereby avoid moral relativism. Here are the entries in the table relating to Bhaskar, Elder-Vass, Porpora, and Sayer

**Bhaskar** *Moral truth is obtained by initially checking that one's beliefs about one's objective are not false, with the aim of removing intra-discursive error; followed by negatively valuing the extra-discursive entity or entities (ills, such as ill health or social structures) which constrain achieving discursive truth and *ceteris paribus* (all other things being equal), positively valuing actions to remove the problematic extra-discursive entity or entities.*

**Elder-Vass** *Moral truth is obtained by consensus in a similar manner to that suggested by Habermas . . . 'just those ethical principles are valid to which all possibly affected persons could agree in an open, truthful context undistorted by differences in power'.*

**Porpora.** Moral truth is obtained in two ways. First via a ‘transcendental feeling’ which Porpora describes as a ‘calling’ or ‘moral summons’ which implies a connection with religion or at least some grounding secular worldview that treads on the religious domain. Second via democracy since moral truth is also a ‘democratic value’ by which Porpora means that it is achieved by in a Habermasian style deliberative democracy where we do not simply vote for our pre-reflective prejudices. Instead we first participate in a public sphere of arguments and counter-arguments about the common good.

**Sayer** Moral truth is based on knowledge of extra-discursive entities (natural) that affect the achievement of human potential. Biological normativity involves valuations and oughts that come from the body and which as feelings may contingently become the object of conscious valuations. The latter are made via the concepts and value frames available to us, so there are different ways of interpreting any given feeling, some better than others. We may decide to ignore or override such valuations, for whatever reason, but we simply wouldn’t survive if we always did so.

How does Bhaskar’s statement reflect his moral realism outlined in chapter one?

How does Elder-Vass’ statement reflect Habermas’s consensualist discourse ethics linked to his three forms of knowledge (chapter two)?

How can school geography cultivate Porpora’s ‘transcendental feeling’?

How does Sayer’s statement relate to school geography’s role in aiding students to develop their human potential or capabilities?

Sonit [62] argues that ‘Silicon Valley is giving us life void of connection’. How do her arguments link to critical realism’s three realms of reality and what is involved in reclaiming our connections to nature and others? Is there an alternative path for digital technology whereby it helps us connect, rather than disconnect with our ground state?

Watch [Tomaszewski’s lecture](#) [63] on sense of place and [Kerski’s lecture on topophilia](#) [64]. How do the concepts of place and placelessness and topophilia relate to duality and non-duality? How do you / can you integrate them into your teaching?

Revisit the seven stages in the dialectical process of human emancipation (MELDARA) outlined on page 00. Apply this to progression in students’ understanding of the global crisis and its resolution. What might students be expected to know, value, and do at each stage? Are the stages distinct or overlapping? How can you integrate such learning with learning about moral realism (chapter one), the four planar model of social being (chapter two), and the transformational model of social activity (chapter four)?

Listen to [Nick Spencer talking with Richard McNeill Douglas](#) [65] about his book ‘The Meaning of Growth: The Rhetoric of Environmental Scepticism and the Defence of Modernity’. To what extent can degrowth be justified on religious / theological grounds? Should geography teachers be co-operating with teachers of religious education in addressing economic growth and degrowth?

[Nestrova](#) [66] researches the implications of degrowth for small businesses. Read the interview and consider whether her prescriptions can be applied to schools.

*Holistic education is based on the premise that each person finds identity, meaning, and purpose in life through connections to the community, to the natural world, and to spiritual values such as compassion and peace. Holistic education aims to call forth from people an intrinsic reverence for life and a passionate love of learning. This is done, not through an academic “curriculum” that condenses the world into instructional packages, but through direct engagement with the environment* ([Holistic education](#) [67])

Read about holism and holistic education. the opposite of reductionism, suggests that phenomena should be studied as wholes along with their connections to other phenomena. Critical realists can be considered holists who provide models and methods for studying whole systems. In earlier chapters we have, for example, outlined their model of reality (the actual, real and empirical domains, page 2), their four planar model of social being (page 14) and their transformational model of social activity (page 88). In chapter three we examined their methods of studying whole systems. While the goal has been to improve your understanding of critical education based on critical realism, you should realise that holism has shaped a part complementary and part contesting version of critical education, namely holistic education, that has been applied to environmental education and education for sustainability notably by [Sterling](#) [68] whose work is based on systems theory and whole systems thinking and [Selby](#) [69] who has developed a pedagogy inspired partly by Lovelock’s [Gaia hypothesis](#) [70] and by [quantum physics](#) [71]. The following quote from [Greenprints for Changing Schools](#) (Greig, Pike & Selby, 1989 [72]) captures something of the part contesting and part complementary nature of the relations between critical education (based in critical realism) and holistic education. Responding to an article I wrote in [Green Teacher](#) [73] the authors wrote:

*Holistic change must by definition, deal in wholes. Change cannot be conceived as a compartmentalised, linear process, but rather as a process of dynamic interaction between all parties and interests involved. . . . From an holistic perspective, change must be both inner and outer-directed; it must address the personal as well as the political. Holistic educators have been sharply criticised from a ‘red’ point of view for placing too much faith in personal consciousness raising and conversion as agents of social change. ‘Radical social change’*

*objects John Huckle, 'comes about through political struggle to redistribute economic and political power and change the basis of decision-making'. Green teachers he continues, 'stress co-operation and new ethics and make little mention of politics, conflict and power'. Whilst what Huckle says is, perhaps, fair comment on much that has been said and written in the name of green / holistic thinking, his criticism uses as its basis a personal-political polarity that is in fact alien to a truly holistic worldview. This worldview requires us to see personal and political transformation as integrated, complementary parts of the change process.* (Greig, Pike & Selby, 1989, p. 26 & 27)

Does critical realism and PMR provide means of integrating personal and political transformations? As foundations for environmental education are they superior to those offered by Sterling and Selby? If so, how? If not, how not?

Read the [Global Citizenship Education Otherwise booklet](#) [74]. Evaluate the cartographies and pedagogical tools and the extent to which they should feature in a geography curriculum that challenges both the epistemological and ontological hegemonies of modern thought.

Read Parker's chapter 'Towards a dialectic of knowledge and care in the global system' in the collection [Interdisciplinarity and Climate Change](#) [75]. Then focus on the summary, Table 12.1 on page 2020. Is there a case for basing school geography on the commitments listed in column three of that table?

## Discussion

'Most critical realists look upon such matters (of spirituality and religion) with considerable scepticism' (Buch-Hansen & Nielsen, 2020, p. 134). Why do you think many / most critical realists are sceptical of PMR?

Think of a place, book, film, artwork, or music that engages you in a way that connects you to your ground state. What experiences do your students mention when you introduce them to Bhaskar's ideas about reality and PMR?

To what extent are you and your students alienated beings 'split off' from your ground states? What roles do social media and AI play in this? How should school geography acknowledge and confront demi-reality? In what ways are the MELDARA stages on pages 121 & 122 and the summary on pages 128 & 129 helpful in this connection?

Can virtual reality be used in school geography to connect students to their ground states?

What kind of environmental consciousness does your current curriculum promote? Having read the chapter are you considering any revisions to this curriculum?

Mouffe in [Towards a Green Democratic Revolution](#) [76] notes that right populists do not shy away from affects in promoting defensive nationalism and that it is affects rather than abstract ideas that motivate people to support dominant or counter hegemonies. She argues that the progressive left should make greater use of affects as it seeks to reformulate socialism in terms of the radicalisation and greening of democracy and global citizenship. Affects are to be mobilised in the public sphere where debates about the future shape of society take place and where agonistic politics and pedagogy are means of overcoming non-duality and reconnecting citizens with their ground state. Does Bhaskar's PMR help to rebalance politics and political education in ways Mouffe would welcome?

What potential is there for co-operating with your English, Art, and Religious Education colleagues in developing a critical pedagogy of co-presence?

Having finished this introductory text on critical realism for geography teachers are you persuaded that it offers a sound framework for curriculum development and renewal? What are its strengths and weaknesses? Where do you intend to take it from here? What further guidance and support may you need?

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