



TIME STAMP: ((0:00:00))

Professor Michael Reiss

Professor of Science Education

Curriculum, Pedagogy & Assessment

UCL Institute of Education

Welcome. Wonderful to see people here and first of all I want to say thank you, as I'm sure Matthew will later, to the other members of the panel because it is a tremendous and wonderfully diverse and very appropriate panel that has been invited and accepted to come here. And the reason we're here is basically is this is a book launch of a, I think extremely impressive book that Matthew has written. He very kindly gave me a copy of it last week and I would say to him that I've already ordered, and obtained from Routledge, my copy, because I was interested in reading it anyway. And was therefore able to return, in the nicest possible way, the copy that he had kindly given to me. And it's a book I read for a number of reasons, and I'm very glad I have done.

For a start, and I don't want to participate too much to some of the threads people pick up but Matthew thought it wouldn't be a bad idea just for me to introduce the broad themes, and fairly obviously one of the broad themes of the book that we're going to be addressing today is Islam and our understanding of Islam today. And as somebody who is not a Muslim I have to say I valued hugely the way that it was written in particular, and again I'm not a historian, for me the historical perspective which when I read theology, one reads rather rarely, was extremely helpful as a way in. So for those people who don't consider themselves to be particular experts on Islam, I can certainly recommend this book.



I can most definitely also recommend the book whether you do or do not consider yourself an expert in critical realism. Critical realism, as we all know, or probably most of us know anyway, I mustn't assume too much because people come from a range of expertise and backgrounds, but critical realism has increasingly over the decades been widely used to address a number of issues. It is not always a way of thinking that everybody finds easy to understand or indeed everybody who tries to teach about it is especially good about so teaching. I'm genuine, I'm not going to carry on flattering you for the whole evening Matthew, but this is I think a very well-written, almost if you like, guide, because what Matthew does is go through several, quite succinctly but very clearly, of the key foundational positions that critical realism has held and then uses them to address the particular questions that he's interested in addressing.

So that's another theme obviously we've got the theme of Islam, we've got the theme of critical realism and then, not surprisingly there is a theme of education which is in a sense closer to my own, as it were, home territory, so I felt very, very interested to read this indeed. And for a start there are some extremely rich data I am very happy with people writing only conceptually but it's always wonderful if you have data to which you can then apply the theological frameworks and relate them to existing conceptual ideas and so forth. And this really succeeds.

I have written in the past ways of trying to make sure that school science is not quite so western and narrow and one of the things I really liked that Matthew did was talk about how attempts to do this sometimes in history do not always work. So he had some wonderful accounts of well-meaning attempts by teachers to, for example, have more teaching of



Bangladeshi history in the classroom when a lot of the pupils were British Bangladeshi pupils and it just didn't work. And Matthew then carefully dissects well maybe why didn't it work? What do we learn from that? Does that mean one just stops doing any sort of culturally sensitive history teaching? No of course it doesn't. What's the way forward? And there is if I might say an excellent analysis and Matthew has written on this before as well as in this book, an excellent analysis of absence in the curriculum and ways of dealing with absence and the various levels at which absence manifests itself.

Mention of absence in this context almost inevitably means and I want to say a minute or so about Roy Bhaskar because he of course is a presence who is not here obviously unavoidably today, some people here knew Roy much better and for longer than I did but he and I were colleagues together and so I knew him quite well the last sort of five, six, seven years, and I think I've used this phrase before at book launches that he organised to which seemed to come his books at about the rate at which my papers got published to be honest. But he was a bit of a sort of *tour de force*, a force of nature. And I think he had two different sort of effects on people, I was in the camp who found him pretty inspirational and just loved talking with him and listening to him and learning from him. Other people found him almost overwhelming, in a number of respects, whether intellectually or personality or he was just too much for them. The two of us were chatting very briefly – Roy is not somebody who naturally fitted into institutional structures and so part of my role, which I enjoyed was trying to allow Roy to, as it were, survive within the IOE because I'm quite happy to say this, there were times when the IOE did not treat Roy as well as he should have been treated. We hung on to him but it was a



A Fresh Look at Islam in a Multi-Faith World:

a philosophy of success through education

Book launch at UCL Institution of Education

Tuesday, 2 June 2015

battle for Roy at times in various circumstances and I'm glad that he was with us for this last academic phase of his life.

Okay at that point I think I can go and sit down and watch Alan who I think is going to very kindly lead us off with the next contribution. Okay thank you Alan.



TIME STAMP: ((0:05:36))

Professor Alan Norrie

Head of School of Law

University of Warwick

Thank you very much, Michael. And congratulations Matthew on your book and thank you very much for inviting me to come here to talk this evening which is a real pleasure. A real pleasure but an absolute impossibility, Matthew has asked me to speak for a strict ten minutes on the aims and purposes and moments of critical realism and the philosophy of meta-reality. Well if that's a ten minute stint then I'm going to have to be pretty good to deliver it, especially as I've never really regarded myself as being particularly an expert on Roy's philosophy of meta-reality, in fact for a long time I was really quite resistant to it being much more happy with the dialectical phase of his thought but I knew there was something in meta-reality and I would never deny it and looking over some of Roy's writings on it for the purposes of coming down here this evening I thought fantastic this is really something that I need to look more at and think more about. And my only regret is that Roy's not here to be a guide to me and to everyone else who's interested in his work but there's a sense in which I can imagine him being here in his wheelchair sitting quieting in a corner and ready to jump on you if you got it wrong – in the nicest possible of ways.

So I think I should probably start by saying I'm not a Muslim; I'm not a believer in God; I don't have a religious sense that pertains to a god of any kind. I was brought up as a Christian but it's a long time since I had any kind of belief of that kind. What I do have is a sense of what I'll call a



universality; a sense perhaps of an underlying unity of being; a belief in human being in the world and alongside other forms of being in that world and in the world itself; perhaps a sense of oneness in and with the world, yet in a world that in so many ways, and quite systematically I think, denies such oneness to us.

So that's roughly where I come from and I'm going to link that in at the very end to what Roy has to say about religion but I've been asked to say a little bit about the main moments of critical realism and the philosophy of meta-reality and as I work through them you'll see how this links up with what I've just said about oneness and then there'll be the question about the relationship between that and religion at the end.

So what's the starting point then? What's the first element in critical realism? Well it's the affirmation of being in the world, structured and differentiated so that we're no longer to be caught up in the travails of the human mind as a filter on being, although our understanding of being is inherently linked to the fact that we are human beings and knowledge is an important part of our being, but we live in a world that's structured and differentiated and we are structured and differentiated in ourselves within that world. We have agency – within structures there is agency. All this is the nature of, as it were you might call it the sociological or the psychological or the socio-natural understanding of what it means to be a human being in the world. And that's the starting point for critical realism.

What then we move on to, and there are going to be seven stages in this: so the second stage is then the idea of being in the world as changing and processual. We are in a world that is one of becoming and begoing. Everything that is comes into being and perishes so there is a sense of what, in terms of the western philosophical tradition, an affirmation of the



not, that there is change. Change can be analysed in terms of something being one thing and no longer being that thing and becoming something else and that process of becoming is a process of negation and emergence of something new. So this process, and we're in a world that's in process, and we have to understand alongside the idea of structure and difference.

And then moving on to a third element in this way of thinking we have the idea of a third level of a totality that we live in a whole, that the world is a whole and we are part of that whole. If you think about structures you think about people and persons in structures, you think about structures in and the difference between social and natural structures, there is a sense of a wholeness, a totality and we have to understand that whatever we think about ourselves it's never just ourselves, we're always being in relation to others and therefore we're being within a wholeness, a totality.

And then fourthly, within that world that is a whole, we are agents. We are acting. We seek to intervene in different ways. And we are moral creatures; we are ethical creatures; we seek to act according to a sense of the right and against the wrong. And that can all be very perturbed by reality and so on and so forth but nonetheless it is the case that we are creatures who think in normative terms: we think of ought, what we ought to do.

And within this context of what we ought to do there are important things that are true for us, morally, ethically. What is true for us is that a sense of freedom is something that we value and that is an intrinsic ingredient in human beings. But alongside freedom we need others to realise freedoms. So we are both creatures that seek freedom, and freedom has



a number of gradations that I can't possibly go into now but we are also creatures who act in solidarity with others. So freedom and solidarity are our ethical existentials.

And freedom and solidarity lead us eventually, if we think it through, if we consider the logic of being far enough we can understand that eventually we can think about, for three minutes, think about a condition in which the happiness, the virtue of all, would be realised and that would be a situation that Roy called the eudemonic society where the happiness of each, the freedom of each, the flourishing of each would be present and would be according to, would also depend upon the flourishing of all.

So these are some ways of thinking through what it means to be a human being in the world. And then once we get to that point we can then go down a level, or back a level, and we can start saying, "Wow there's something in being a human being that we can't simply keep it at a distance, we actually live this," we live this reality and living that reality takes us, as it were, what I've described I can describe it sort of arm's length but what I now need to do is I need to talk subjectively about the experience of being and about the sense of freedom that is within us and that's a kind of eureka moment.

And that eureka moment takes us on to, that's a fifth point, to a sixth point which is a sense of rediscovering our oneness with the world. And in rediscovering our oneness with the world with nature, with the joy of nature, the joy that is in the shared joke, the joy that is in every moment of cooperation, there we have a sense of the world becoming reenchanting for us. And in a reenchanting world we're eventually going to find that that is a world that is essentially a world ultimately of unity. Although we live in a world of difference, in a world of conflict, there is a level at which



there is also a unity in things and we are part of that unity and we are co-present with everyone else in a sense of unity, at a deeper level. And it's that deeper level of unity that I think is where we move onto a sense of the universal and that is where Roy's philosophy of meta-reality eventually takes us.

Now just a couple of points then just to finish off. This unity is a unity that is I think what Roy would say was where the great religions stood in their different ways. Now what he had to say about religion was that he was not a believer in God, but he was a believer in this sense of the unity of things. He did speak about God for a while but then he found that that was really kind of not the main point, that the main point was that he wanted to talk about the absolute. And he wanted to talk about the absolute in a way that everyone could understand and where people wouldn't get embattled by different religions. And just to give you a sentence from Roy, he says, God for him became the cosmic envelope and as the God within us became our ground state. And it's that sense of us being in a world that was one with a unity within ourselves that involved the co-present with everyone else. That was the basic kind of starting point that he said. What he wanted to do, he said, was to make spirituality compatible with secularism. And that in ten minutes is the philosophy of critical realism and meta-reality! Thank you.



TIME STAMP: ((0:17:06))

Mervyn Hartwig

Editor

Journal of Critical Realism

I chair the Cheryl Frank Memorial Prize Committee, of a panel of judges and Matthew has won this year's prize with his book and I want to congratulate him formally on that as the chair of that committee. It's awarded for the best piece of work in and about critical realism for that year. And the judges were unanimous, and that speaks volumes I think so congratulations.

Now I've been asked to speak about the theoretical side of things and at that level Matthew's project as I understand it is to produce a theologically informed, educational philosophy called Islamic Critical Realism that can both help Muslims meet the extraordinary challenges of our times, and promote a better understanding among non-Muslims of Islam. So that's the sort of theoretical goal.

His method is twofold as I see it: first establishing correlational resonance between the philosophy of critical realism and the tradition of Islamic theological philosophy, a method by the way that has excellent pedigree in the philosophy of Paul Tillich, he pioneered the method of correlation.

And secondly he then wants to deploy critical realism to underlay the four contemporary: interpretation, clarification and deepening of Islamic theory and practice.



Now one of the things I value most about Matthew's book is that he has this superb grasp, I think, of the main rationale for what Alan was talking about at the end there, the philosophy of meta-realism, or the philosophy of meta-reality. And that is it wants to articulate a metatheory that can serve as a basis for intra, inter and extra faith dialogue and understanding and that's its fundamental, or one of its fundamental rationales.

So what meta-realism, as Alan implied, basically does in regard to critical realism is add a transcendental or spiritual infrastructure to the system. What philosophers normally call the absolute ((0:19:51?)) or theologians call God with certain qualifications of course normally.

And it does so, meta-realism does this at the highest level of extraction, you can't go any higher, it's not very concrete at all. And it argues for an open, ultimate order of pure dispositionality and categorical structure that informs the world at the level of the absolute but informs the whole world in which we live without saturating it or exhausting it.

Now the basis for the dialogue I mention is what Roy calls, this is Roy's theory, what he calls the higher truth as distinct from the ordinary truth. The higher truth says there's only one absolute but there are many paths to it, there are many episcopologically relative accounts of it so the absolute both manifests and is accessed differently in different regions geohistory and different periods of geohistory to different people so that gives you a basis for dialogue and mutual understanding. There are many paths, there's only one absolute, we're talking about the same thing but there are many ways of understanding and accessing it.



So on this view meta-realism is not at all in competition with religion or theology and I think that's the way Matthew sees it, and I agree with him. On the contrary it seeks to underlabour for religion and theology and help them to develop and thrive in a manner that's conducive to human flourishing.

Now Matthew can't just deploy the method of correlation in a straightforward way on contemporary Islam because that's significantly in the grip of people who espouse the ordinary truth, radical fundamentalists. And that truth says, "My way is the only way! Your way is rubbish!" and so it's episcopologically absolutist.

And of course there are reasons for that that Matthew goes into in his book I mean this is very largely a reaction against your western domination, colonialism and things like that. But anyhow there it is and so what Matthew does, and I think this is a brilliant move, he deploys the method of correlation recuperatively in relation to Islam's own enlightenment or axial age which occurred or started more than a thousand years ago. So it's an exercise in recuperation and revitalisation.

And that enlightenment, by the way, had a profound understanding of what I'm calling the higher truth so that makes the move even more advantageous.

So this entrains, and there are two things: negatively it entrains critique of today's demi-real forms of Islamic institutions and domination and practices, sorry, as well as the wider social context of domination within which they're embedded. And positively it entrains a programme for the revitalisation and re-enchantment of Islamic practice and belief in the new context.



Matthew of course doesn't claim to resolve all the theoretical problems his work raises and on the face of it there are certain tensions with some of the things in critical realism, for example, one wonders how Islamic critical realists hierarchy of transcendence, how that correlates with Roy's radical anti-elitism, anti-substitutionism. But there are a number of things could be said about that but I've run out of time.

Let me just say there's no requirement that a regional philosophy such as Islamic critical realism should mechanically conform to critical realism. There's only an invitation to reconsider, that's all, there can be no requirement and so what Matthew's done, develop Islamic critical realism with its own regional ontology and episcopology and so on is perfectly proper according to critical realism itself.

And then secondly I'd say that critical realism metatheory for its part can definitely learn from Islam. And here I'd single out for special mention, I think Matthew really singles it out too, the theory of the demi-real. I take Matthew to be saying that there's a profound understanding of demi-reality in all but name within the tradition of Islam and so Islam can be a powerful ally, or potential ally, in our struggle to get rid of demi-reality.

My time is up so on the theoretical side it's an extraordinarily accomplished work I think, potentially a game changing one as Roy says in his endorsement. So over to Priscilla to talk about the more practical side of things.



TIME STAMP: ((0:26:12))

Professor Priscilla Alderson

Professor Emerita of Childhood Studies

UCL Institute of Education

Hello. My interest is in social research with children and young people and the first reason I welcome Matthew's book is that so far there haven't been that many books on critical realism and young people. And the second reason I welcome it so much is that it connects critical realism to children and young people with such serious respect for them.

Matthew's erudite review of centuries of western and eastern history sets the context for understanding today's young people's differing, often conflicting viewpoints. And he shows how greatly Islamic, but also all other school students, could benefit from improved history, citizenship, and religious education in British schools. And the tragedy that they are being downgraded. He partly shows how and why this is happening despite their great relevance in an increasingly violent world.

They could help to increase mutual respect between all young people from both western and eastern heritage and to develop richer meanings of the confusing concept 'British' – does any one of us know what it means exactly? – as he shows.

Matthew addresses crucial questions, how can we promote humanities education in schools that helps to increase, as he says, everyone's humanity, that's what they're for! Increase their trust, their informed understanding and peace between all the very different social groups.



How can we reduce and prevent conflict and violence? And how can schools work with children and young people so that they may all flourish, socially, mentally and spiritually?

Socrates believed that education is kindling a flame; not filling a vessel and Matthew addresses this skilful kindling work. It's part of critical realist seriousness which as he says connects theory to practice in an integrity of daily living, being, doing and relating. The horizontal axis of the social and political is joined to the vertical axis of spirituality and the active emotional moral desire of many, perhaps all, young people to align their ideals with their daily practical action, however they're able to act this out within the constraints of modern living.

Last month two surveys reported children and young people's anxieties about immigration and about Islam and they showed how urgently these worries need to be addressed, explicitly at school but it has to be done through very sensitive, skilful, open discussion with them and Matthew describes this kind of work in the book.

For a while I was a schoolteacher and as the youngest, newest member of staff I was given RE to cover, the school didn't know whether I knew anything or cared less about religion. As it happened I was very interested in it but I realised through that experience the great challenges Matthew is posing for teachers and schools, for whole education systems but also for whole societies and the way we live our political and economic daily lives. How can we support children's spirituality?

We glamorise war and military heroes, nostalgia for the World Wars for example. Did you know that the top selling video game is a US Army



recruitment tool? And the British Army, does anyone know how often the British Army visits schools each year? Yes?

((Audience answers: - 2,000 2 million))

In between 4,000 and we taxpayers of course fund this propaganda.

How do the visits affect Muslim students when they know that our wars are mainly conducted in Islamic countries? And yet the visits make out that war is romantic, fun and necessary. And one in three new recruits to the British Army is a child under 18. So is it any wonder that some Muslim young people adapt these strong messages into loyalty to causes they partly identify with and go off, for example, to join Isis?

Matthew doesn't dwell too much on that in the book do you Matthew? I hope you don't mind me talking about it but I'm sure it's near the top of lots of people's minds, I think Matthew's book is so tremendously relevant to today's anxieties and challenges and difficulties and it's a great reference book to think about for these.

Now the war propaganda is only part of the daily deluge of messages that jeopardise children's original spiritual sense. People who spend time with children know that all of them arrive and in their early months and years they have a strong sense, don't they, of altruism, solidarity, dignity, freedom and justice. And we need genuine debate in humanities classes to debate the deluge that is challenging this spirituality and that is particularly why Matthew's is such an important and timely book.



TIME STAMP: ((0:32:22))

Dr. Matthew Wilkinson

Visiting Research Fellow

UCL Institute of Education

I'm actually going to show a PowerPoint because as a learner myself I find visual things helpful, I don't know if you do or not but I hope so. So thank you all very much for coming, we've intentionally kept our presentations as brief as possible because we want to have two discussion periods when, in the first one, after my brief address now you can address particular questions that may already have been popping up in your minds to the panel. And then we're going to have two more speakers briefly and then we're going to have a much more general debate and discussion about the nature and status of faith in a multi-faith society and Islam in particular. So that's coming. So thank you all very much for coming to join the discussion.

And those of you that don't know about critical realism as philosophy have already heard mention the seminal work of Roy Bhaskar who was one of the, if not the founding figures of critical realist thought from which critical realists have all taken a great deal. And he is now, as Michael said, he is now a real determinate absence in the future of critical realist thought, whereas until November, when he died he was a powerful determining presence and absence is a theme that critical realist thought has foreground in a very important and significant way.

Bhaskar used to quote with reference to his own contribution the work of Isaac Newton when he wrote in a letter of 1676, "If I have seen further it



is by standing on the shoulders of giants.” And my own work and this book claim to look a little bit further in its own field of the relationship through education of Islam and Muslims to modernity and post-modernity, by standing on the shoulders, not only of Roy himself who was my own mentor and guide in matters intellectual and beyond that, but also indeed on the shoulders of the members of the panel who you have briefly heard talk tonight who have in their own fields and with their own wisdom, applied, adapted, interpreted and expanded critical realist thought so that it now covers an enormous range of fields and endeavours: legal studies – Alan; Paddy in catholic thought; Nissan in developing Jewish theology and thought and so on and so forth. So thank you so much all of you for coming and for your contribution to my work.

So in this session I'm going to be a bit more technical. I'm going to outline the core claims of my book, *A Fresh Look at Islam in a Multi-Faith World: A Philosophy for Success through Education* and then I'm going to give a taster at quite a fundamental level, rather than the meta-real level that Mervyn was referring to of some of the core principles of the philosophy of Islamic critical realism, which is a philosophy which I intend to under labour through humanity's educational provision to help young people establish a firmer and more nuanced sense of themselves and their relationship, both potential and actual, to multi-faith society.

So just a little bit about me so you know where I've come from. I was a history and Islamic studies teacher for a period of 15 years, and I'm very happy to see ((Ibrahim Adessy?)) here, who at one point was one of my students, so that's a wonderful thing to see. I had a background in theology at Trinity College Cambridge. I actually embraced Islam in the early 1990s partly as a result of my theological studies. I later, after my school teaching career, did a PhD in the relationship of national history



curriculum to the emerging identities and possibilities of Muslim young people in Britain. And then I establish a project called *Curriculum for Cohesion* which looks to build that platform of success for young people through humanities education. I'm acted as an expert witness in Islamic theology. And I'm originator of this work of Islamic critical realism.

So the first part of my book which I'll sketch out for you just so you've got some idea what you can look forward to, I hope! The first section deals with the historical relationship of Islam to modernity and post-modernity which, as Mervyn said, have been geopolitically and conceptually problematic for Islam and the Muslim majority world. Broadly speaking this section outlines the fact that since the 16th century the Muslim majority world has attempted to embrace the paraphernalia of modernity, for example, banks and nuclear weapons, whilst internally the gradual breakdown of the balance of power between the class of religious legal scholars – the Ulama – and the ruling classes, internally and externally the pressures of colonialism prevented the majority of the Muslim majority world from responding effectively and authentically to the essence of the technological social and spiritual changes that have characterised the world since the Western Enlightenment.

As a result of this, the section explains, many Muslims today perceive or intuit an unessential mismatch between the practice of their professional lives in non-religious contexts within secularising societies in particular and the articulation of their religious faith. This has been exacerbated, I claim, by the absence of a contemporary philosophy of Islam to perform its traditional function as it did in the period of the Muslim Enlightenment of mediating between religious principles and the actualities of daily life.



This in turn, this absence, has generated a series of malign and unnecessary dichotomies such as Islam versus the West, global citizenship to the Ulama versus national citizenship that block a mutually healthy relationship between many Muslims and particularly the young Muslims with multi-faith societies and vice versa.

Nevertheless as educators and despite, I think it's fair to claim, the Islamic world being at a spiritual and intellectual low point, as educators we need to remember that Muslim young people can be engaged and re-inspired by a tradition of academic excellence that was the patrimony of Islam and Islamic civilisation. So we might note historically in this regard that Islamic civilisation between the period 700 to 1400 made a seminal contribution to the rebirth of learning in what was then known as the Christian west, obviously the Christian renaissance, for example the rediscovery and expansion of Aristotelian natural empiricism by Ibn Rushd, who is known in the west as Averroes, through the scholastics into Europe. Muslim young people need to be reconnected and take confidence from a tradition of intellectual excellence of which one core generative mechanism was creative theological philosophy. In *A Fresh Look at Islam in a Multi-Faith World* I propose that the philosophy of Islamic critical realism can be the basis for this revitalising creative theological philosophy applied for Islamic self and other understanding in a multi-faith world and then applied systematically through a humanities education. So the first part of the book sets up this historical context.

The second part of the book outlines the philosophy of Islamic critical realism which is a philosophy of religion which is attempting, and this is important, to underlabour for Islamic self-understanding and practice in multi-faith society. So it is not a reforming project, it doesn't in any way touch, if you like, the consensually agreed apparatus of Islamic doctrine



or practice, which has been honed over centuries, but it works underneath to bring that body of connection between the human and the divine alive again in a new way, in new contexts. Islamic critical realism is based on the seminal insights of critical realist thoughts which Alan has outlined for us as applied in particular to Islamic practice and belief. So unlike Alan who made the very fair case that of course critical realists in some senses was a secular spirituality or to bring alive a secular spirituality, I actually apply it to bring alive the properties and tendencies that are already inherent in orthodox Islam.

So there are five foundational principles of Islamic critical realism, the first is this idea of underlabouring, we'll come to it. The second, critically, perhaps the core of it is this idea of philosophical and religious seriousness. The third is the application of the fulcrum of critical realism to Islamic practices. The fourth is adducing a critical realist interpretation of the Qur'an, including Qur'anic meta-reality in which unity trumps duality at a substratum level. And then finally dialectical critical realist interpretation of the life of the Prophet Muhammad which is designed to bring alive the life of Muhammad to show how Muslims could be reconnected to a peaceful but transformative agentic engagement with the world.

So I'll briefly go through these, this is the first. The principle is a word that is actually derived from the English philosopher John Lock, this word underlabouring. So a shared meta-theoretical commitment, underlabouring. The primary purpose one could say of critical realist thought is to underlabour. And this means to bring conceptual and philosophical parity to other intellectual and more practical enterprises. So for example critical realist thinking has turned its hand to the natural and social sciences, environmental activism, disability studies, conflict



resolution, by clearing away erroneous and redundant philosophical concepts that lie in the path of knowledge.

This philosophical commitment to, in Lock's words, clearing the ground a little and removing some of the rubbish that lies in the way to knowledge, and to a comprehensive conception of practices of human flourishing is precisely shared by Islam and its tradition of philosophy, both Kalam which is more theological and Falsafa which is more philosophical. Within this tradition brought together of Kalam and Falsafa theological philosophy, Islamic critical realism aims to provide an intellectual bridgehead between the post enlightenment intellectual conditions of modernity and the revealed principles of Islam by clearing away unnecessary, un-Islamic dichotomies such as Islam versus the west, natural science versus religion, that set up the intellectual conditions in which demi-reality, that is to say highly causative falsehood, prevails. And this ideal of demi-reality is very important in my book and as Mervyn said it's a way I think that Islamic tradition can contribute to the body of critical realist thinking.

So the second principle is the idea of seriousness. That is to say that Islam and critical realist philosophy are both philosophically serious. That is to say they demand a knowledge practice consistency which is essential to their very nature. So Islam is serious because once you have committed to a doctrinal believe you have committed at the same time to a set of practices, for example, the so-called five pillars of Islam. It is the balanced interpenetration of practice and belief that in Islam is believed to generate the human relationship with God. So the phrase for example in the Qur'an, ((0:44:37?)) those who believe and do right action are connected by a particle ((Wu?)) which indicates and intrinsic partnership between practice and belief and also an extrinsic relationship.



Similarly critical realism from Bhaskar's earliest imminent critique based on the intelligibility of experimental activity, which I won't go into today but it's outlined in the book in full, has demanded philosophical seriousness in knowledge practice consistency roughly speaking Hume's denial of the ontology of causal laws and deep natural structures, led him to a position where he could state, there is no reason why he should not leave a building by the first storey window. But of course if that was a serious position Hume should have done it at least 50% of the time and he never did this. Thus Humian actualism and modernist derivatives of it extrude thoughts from the experience of the world and are therefore philosophically unserious. Likewise extreme Islamist interpretations of Islam do exactly the same, the extrude Islam from the actual conditions of contemporary life and are therefore unserious.

By contrast the marriage of philosophical and religious seriousness is at the beating heart of Islamic critical realism. The reclaiming of philosophical and religious seriousness by young Muslims is a key to the recovery of a contemporary world view that is consistent with Islamic practice and an Islam that is critically consistent, rather than conformatively consistent with the conditions of modernity.

So the third principle is the fulcrum of critical realism namely the interrelationship of the principles of ontological realism, epistemological relativism and judgemental rationalism as applied to the dimension of the spirit and God.

So ontological realism, roughly speaking ontological realism claims that being exists independently of knowing in the natural world and in the social natural world that being exists relatively independently of knowing in that once one comes to know people and humans and structures rather



than objects that act of knowing changes things. However in the spiritual dimension we can say by analogy of application that God can be said to exist, or indeed not to exist, independently of our knowledge or belief in Him or indeed in the circumstances Her. By analogy unseen spiritual reality such as the human and divine spirit or the divine will can exist and be allowed to exist philosophically independently of our knowledge or belief in them. Ontological realism philosophically about God does not claim a ((preoria?)) that God exists although of course as a Muslim I believe that He does but the fact and realities of existence are not dependent on our knowledge of Him. Therefore ontological realism about God makes God talk philosophically plausible in the classroom and indeed in many cases necessary.

So ontological realism of its nature necessitates epistemological relativism and in this scheme of Islamic critical realism epistemological relativism pertains to different faith traditions and traditions within traditions and different individual points of view within traditions that all direct their gaze upon the ontological realities of faith. In this understanding all interpretations of the ontology of faith are subject to radical human fallibility and have the potential to be wrong which does not affect the ontological reality of the phenomena to which the traditions pertain. In other words by the principle of epistemological relativism the fact that God has been known differently does not mean that the God that is know is different. The fact that God and his words, if they exist, have been interpreted wrongly does not imply that God does not exist. Critical realists call this conflation of being with knowing importantly which the book explains, the epistemic fallacy.

And finally within this application the connection of ontological realism with epistemological relativism necessitate judgemental rationality. In



other words there exist, or can be discovered, coherent rational, emotional, experiential grounds for choosing or justifying one mode of spiritual access to these divine realities, as opposed to another. It is therefore possible with this fulcrum of critical realism both to claim that God has accessed and revealed his being through a variety of traditions to choose or commit to one tradition as opposed to another whilst drawing on the insights of other faiths. In the perennialist language we can allow using this framework for the fact that many paths do indeed lead to the higher truth, to the absolute and to God, without thinking or claiming that they are equally effective or truthful routes. And this is obviously important for children from particular faith backgrounds because you don't want to leave them just thinking that all religions are the same both morally, ethically or alethically. It is a framework which I believe can potentially engender ontological confidence in children and depth together with epistemic and interpretive humility in Muslim and other children.

This explanation of the fulcrum of Islamic critical realism gives us the fourth principle and this is that the Qur'an, the revered book that Muslims turn to for guidance, can present a critical realist vision of the universe. For example we can take the Qur'anic verse, in the creation of the heavens and earth and the alternation of night and day are signs for people who have used their intellects, the famous Qur'anic verse, and this verse perfectly describes the relationship which I've just outlined between ontological realism in the creation of the heavens and the earth and the alternation of night to day, epistemological relativism are signs and judgemental rationality for people who use their intellects. Islamic critical realism reclaims the fact that critical rationality is a core an essential quality of serious Qur'anic belief and approach to the Qur'an. Unthinking belief or blind following is not an Islamic state of mind.



And the final basic principle that's outlined in the second section of the book, in order to revitalise and underlabour for Islamic practice, is the idea that it is credible to make the claim that the Prophet Muhammad's mission in the world was critical realist in that he applied Islamic teaching to transform social structures, for example, tribes, which he recognised were real and existed prior to individual agency and yet that they were open to radical human agentic transformation. Indeed one can describe the prosecution of this transformative mission as a paradigmatic exemplar of the dialectics of critical realism enacted in history.

So very briefly we have the first moment that Alan described earlier, the moment of non-identify of differentiation, of distinction. And in this period of Muhammad's life belief was distinguished from unbelief for example and social welfare was distinguished from social neglect and malpractice. However this led at the second stage to absence so there was an absence, non-identity with tribal beliefs led to an absence of status, a persecution and indeed the absencing of Muhammad of his community from the very society of Mecca.

However this process of absence in itself generated the third stage, the period of totality through emigration when the Prophet Muhammad moved his community to Medina where the entirety of the Islamic paradigm was established including patterns of worship and daily behaviour *ibadat* and ((Wahamalet?)) in Arabic. And in this period the solidarity of all people of Abrahamic faiths was made constitutional within Islam.

And finally this stage, this dialectical moment gave way to the fourth dimension, the moment of transformative praxis when the Arabian peninsula was transformed from a region based upon tribal differences to one connected through being a community of faith.



This example of Muhammad thus delineated it can help young Muslims understand that a peaceful engagement with transforming society does not mean to be consigned to passivity, persecution or marginality.

So the third section of the book, and since we're in an education context, and I hope maybe there are some history teachers here or religious education teachers, deals very much with how this theory can be applied to create a connected and serious humanities education.

So let's briefly look at one idea that comes out of that section, using again this fulcrum of critical realism: ontological realism, epistemological relativism, and judgemental rationalism.

So in RE this philosophy is funnelled down to create a pedagogical framework. So ontological realism becomes spiritual being. Epistemological relativism becomes spiritual knowing and understanding and judgemental rationality becomes spiritual deliberation, experience and commitment.

These in turn are accessed through three pedagogical modes. In the extra-faith mode the teacher introduces the child to looking at the fields of absolute concerns, independently of any sort of religious commitment, or lack of it indeed. Religious phenomena, metaphysical realities, things that are claimed by religions to exist are introduced to children. And this mode of understanding can bring the entire classroom within the field of absolute concern. This gives onto the inter-faith mode, which is the comparative mode of exploring different religious phenomenon from the point of view of different faith traditions and positions within traditions – this mode of course has received a lot of attention over the last 20 years. However for this to be a serious and connected provision it needs to be



brought alive through the intra-faith mode. And the intra-faith mode is the mode for exploring in depth religious experience for children bringing their own experience of the absolute into the classroom and for allowing them and giving them the critical tools to make personal decisions and judgements about the things that they believe. It's the relationship of these modes which can be the basis of a serious religious education.

So if we look at the idea of the afterlife, in the extra-faith mode we could discuss the nature, if it exists, of an afterlife in religions. Is there any empirical evidence for it? If it did exist what would its nature be? In the inter-faith mode we can look at different conceptions of the afterlife – heaven and hell, garden and fire, so on and so forth. And in the intra-faith mode we can say, "What does it mean to believe in the afterlife? How might such a belief affect the world as we live in it now and here? And by what criteria can someone judge the plausibility or lack of it of different conceptions of what happens after death?"

This framework can be the basis of an RE that both does justice to the faith of young people and engenders in them epistemic humility with intellectual curiosity and the ability to learn from the other.

This can also be a framework for exploring highly contentious issues such as the role of martyrdom in violent Jihadist extremism, without stigmatising or singling out a single faith community.

So if we look how the same fulcrum could be applied to history education. So ontological realism in a history education provision means providing a broad interconnected ontology of events as they have happened in the past. They really did happen and they were massive, they were vast, they were interconnected. And especially in terms of a relatively narrow



national curriculum that we now have it means absencing what I theorise in this book as the absent curriculum.

The absent curriculum is everything that could have been but has not been included in the teaching of history in a classroom and it exists at the level of national syllabus, of departmental schemes of work or what happens in the classroom from the departmental schemes of work. And it's critically important if we are to create an ontologically embracing historical provision that these absences are absented to create a greater totality of provision. However this ontological realism is connected to the necessity for diverse interpretive perspectives and indeed these need to be brought to life themselves by rich and varied pedagogies, school visits and so on and so forth, and introducing children to the possibility of historical decision-making and the criteria of critical plausibility.

This framework can be one tool for enabling a historical provision that is more socially inclusive because it is more ontologically embracing and epistemologically challenging. It can provide all children with valid and interesting points of access on our national history and on the history of our interconnections with the rest of the world, including vitally at this time the Muslim majority world.

It can also be applied in citizen education. In the extra-systemic mode we ask the big questions, what is the nature of governance? What is a citizen? Let's not assume anything, let's throw it all up for grabs. What does it mean to be a civic part of any society?

In the inter-systemic mode we can say, what are the different types of government and citizens? How do they compare? We could introduce



children to democracy of different types – to oligarchy, to theocracies, to any number of hybrid versions of these things. How do they compare?

And finally we can say if we are to plump for liberal democracy, what is in its central nature that makes it better than other things? Let's not assume a priority that it is, let's get buy-in from children to democracy on their own terms and let's allow Muslim youngsters to see how the frameworks and traditions of governments that have existed within Islam can enrich and cross-fertilise and find a place within democratic systems.

So finally there are four big things which I think the book expounds and articulates which I would like you to maybe think about and if you are to get the book to reflect upon. The first is the claim that the spiritual dimension is one real component of an articulated, holistic ontology of human being along with the intellectual, emotion, civic, instrumental dimensions, the spiritual dimension has to be accounted for in education. This spiritual dimension requires a serious humanities education if this dimension is to contribute properly to human flourishing.

The third point is the absence of a serious philosophy of Islam has hindered the relationship of Islam with modernity. And the final point, and I think it's an important one, is given the presence of a theological philosophy such as Islamic critical realism and Islamic critical realism claims no monopoly on the theological philosophical enterprise, and if it, with its attendant application through humanities education, Islam and Muslims can both benefit from and be beneficial to the just critical operation of liberal democracies and indeed other types of society.

So thank you very much for listening and now we'll have a discussion.

((Q&A 1:00:32 – 1:09:20))



TIME STAMP: ((1:09:26))

Rabbi Nissan Wilson

Senior Rabbi

Redbridge United Synagogue

One of the things that Roy [Professor Roy Bhaskar] used to like to do was to make introductions and one of the first people that he introduced me to was Matthew. And he said, "Well you two must talk," and I thank Roy for making that introduction and certainly from looking at your book and preparing my thoughts for this evening it's been a very enriching experience and I very much look forward to continuing this discussion because this has shown me just how much we have to talk about.

In a farewell address to mark his retirement in 2013, after 22 years as Chief Rabbi of the United Hebrew Congregations of the British Commonwealth emeritus Chief Rabbi Lord Sachs addressed what he believed to be the greatest challenge for Judaism today and I quote from the accompanying pamphlet which was tellingly named *Judaism Engaged With The World*. "Today the two most powerful movements in Jewish life are assimilation and segregation. Jews are either engaging with the world at the cost of disengaging from Judaism or engaging with Judaism at the cost of disengaging from the world. Assimilation and segregation may work for individuals even large numbers of them but it cannot be the way for the Jewish people as a whole, not only are they dangerous they are a failure of nerve in the Judaic projects.



Can it really be that Judaism has nothing to contribute to society and to the world? Are Jewish faith and practice so fragile that they can only be sustained by being screened from all contact with other cultures?

So the greatest challenge for Judaism is that of contemporary relevance. And through my own education and background I've seen arguably successful working models amongst the segregationists and it could and has been argued that Judaism is alive and well amongst the segregationists and that there are communities that are flourishing. However in my professional life for the most part I've worked as an educator and religious leader with Jews whose identity is largely shaped by western liberal values and who are much more susceptible to complete assimilation than they are to segregation. And so if the Jewish community is not to be the batten down the hatches or allow its young people to disappear into the ether it must consider embracing those contemporary values and bringing them into a dialectic with theology and religion. The difficulty with this for educators, whether religious leaders, parents or of course RE teachers is that with young people religion often does not really stand a chance. And there are two reasons for this, the first is that the permissive values that are essential to a liberal polity are naturally enticing to young people are often keen to embrace any form of freedom or anything that promises freedom of any sort. And the second reason is that the liberal discourse is the dominant discourse in contemporary society.

So like Matthew I believe that for Judaism as well the answer lies in part in finding a philosophy that's capable of underlabouring the beliefs and practices of a religion, in this case Judaism.



So what can critical realism do? A worthy research project would be to work through Matthew's book and highlight which part could easily be applied to Judaism and Jewish education, perhaps three different highlighter pens: green, red and yellow; yes, no and don't know, or needs further research.

I haven't done that yet. I only just thought of it. But here are a few pointers. Judaism would be very much at home with the critical realist holy trinity – I know that sounds odd, Matthew has very kindly renamed it as the fulcrum which means that I think Judaism would be even more comfortable with it. Over the past couple of years I've used the basic principles of the trinity, or the fulcrum and introduced it to my students and I believe I've received quite a positive response. Shall I call it the trinity or the fulcrum I'm not sure?

Mervyn Hartwig

Call it the fulcrum because there's an example, now here we have a contribution to critical realism because I think Roy was, when he christened it the Holy Trinity he was punning on absence but he forgot about the theological situation. Not everybody accepts the Trinity so fulcrum is probably a better name.

Rabbi Nissan Wilson

Okay.

Matthew Wilkinson

It's official

Rabbi Nissan Wilson



It's official. It's a shame about the irony that's now been lost but if it does its job better we'll call it the fulcrum. It provides a way of understanding the world; maintaining strongly held beliefs while allowing the space for others to hold different beliefs all the while avoiding the pitfalls of relativism. Modern Jewish scholars have pointed out that the etymology of the Hebrew word amanah which is usually translated to faith actually doesn't mean blind faith but really implies, and a close look at the etymology really implies that what it means is rational trust. And it means living a life almost of seriousness, but living a life with full commitment but that is based on rational belief, that is based on rational trust. In other words judgemental rationality.

In its simplest form the fulcrum is a strikingly simple way of underlabouring for a Judaism engaged with the world, to use Sachs' phraseology. I should also add here that perhaps above all I see critical realism as providing a framework or a methodology or underlabouring for emancipatory social research. A critical realist approach allows for a critical analysis of the value dependent perspectives of both lay persons and researchers. The need for reflexivity is well understood by critical realism being implicit in the critical realist understanding of epistemic relativity. The researcher must know that her knowledge is socially produced, value-dependent and always open to revision.

Judgemental rationality though mediates this relativism by accepting that there are good reasons for accepting some beliefs over others and what follows on from this is the possibility of what is termed in critical realism, explanatory critique. This is a form of critique whose aim is to understand why a false belief is held, by identifying what social structures are prevailing factors in sustaining a particular belief it is possible to go



beyond a philosophical critique of a belief and consider what structures might need to change.

Just a few words about dialectical critical realism and the philosophy of meta-reality. There it really gets more complex. We had a discussion at a seminar last term, Paddy spoke as well, about Judaism's ethics and the critical realist ethics during which I highlighted some of the key differences. With regard to the philosophy of meta-reality we're getting into really difficult territory. Last summer I'd been attending the critical realism reading seminars and I'd been struggling with the philosophy of meta-reality, as I'm sure many people had, but approaching this from the perspective of the Jewish theological tradition I found many of the ideas intuitive but the overall structure had an attraction for me. My thoughts were somewhat crystallised when I attended a presentation by Andrew Wright at the ((1:17:08?)) Conference in July and Andrew outlined what he referred to as the epistemic commensurability and the ontological incommensurability of the philosophy of meta-reality and in that case he was referring to Christianity. But for example the questions Matthew referred to before ((1:17:24?)) referred to it as well, the God versus the absolute, are these the same things in Judaism and in other religions I'm sure as well the idea of thinking of God as a person, how does that square with the absolute and where the philosophy has a well-developed ontology how does that ontology compare with the well-developed ontology of Judaism?

To conclude I mean only to flag up these questions, as Mervyn said it's only an invitation to reconsider and I would perhaps highlight in yellow with a note to refer to Matthew's work and discuss with colleagues more knowledgeable than myself. I think that one of the great challenges in bringing together two very different traditions into dialectic is really one of



A Fresh Look at Islam in a Multi-Faith World:

a philosophy of success through education

Book launch at UCL Institution of Education

Tuesday, 2 June 2015

language, simply sometimes a philosopher and a theological may use very different words yet mean more or less the same thing. But also they may use identical words and phrases that mean exactly the opposite.



TIME STAMP: ((1:18:36))

Dr. Paddy Walsh

Deputy Director

Centre for Research & Development in Catholic Education

UCL Institute of Education

There are advantages in coming last you can pull on what you'd ill-prepared while you're listening. So I'm down for two things really history as piety and critical realism and Christianity. I may start with the latter critical realism and Christianity. And I should say that I acquired through nobody's fault but my own, the book, just yesterday so I by no means have read it all but I did read first chapter one and the chapter on history. And I was immensely impressed with the programme that is laid out in chapter one, really and as he says, and as has been commented on critical realism brought to the service of the interpretation of the Muslim faith and Islam Muslims in education. So here we have the birth of a philosophy or if you like philosophical theology and of a philosophy of education.

Now I really dig philosophy in education I mean I've devoted a lot of my life to philosophy of education and what I would like to say, what would be of interest here with reference now to Christianity, is we have in this building a centre for research and development in Christian Catholic education actually and it produces a journal, the first ever international journal of Catholic education International Studies in Catholic Education, I think it's called, and meant to bring in a copy for illustrative purposes and one of the projects of this journal which has been running for about eight years, is to accumulate articles towards a philosophy of Catholic



education, a contemporary philosophy of Catholic education. One of the things that has turned up in looking into what's available in the literature on this is a prescription of what such a philosophy of education should contain or what its characteristics should be. And I'm going to list them. The writer at the time was basically noticing the advantage that Dewey had, who really invented philosophy of education over others who maintained antipragmatic or realist positions and so on in that there was a very close connection between his philosophy of education and his progressive educational practice. One translated easily into the other. So in an effort to gain that advantage back but associated with a realist epistemology rather than a private is one. This writer was saying a good philosophy of Catholic education should have the following characteristics. It should be concrete and by concrete he meant in close association with educational work and educational workers. And that obviously includes schools of teachers but I am reminded by Matthew and what he says later, it also includes things like the mosque or the church, it also includes parents and education at home. So that's one characteristic it should be concrete.

Another is it should be contemporary because education is always concerned with bringing youngsters up to the contemporary level.

Thirdly it should be, in the case of Catholic schools, it should be Catholic. Therefore it has to include theology along with philosophy.

Fourthly it should be in creative and critical interaction with the human sciences. Now are you ticking these off in reference to what Matthew's been doing? Because I was doing that as I read that first chapter.

Finally it should be historically aware, and this by the way is one single idea, it should be historically aware and concerned for the future of



humanity and the planet and the model that is proposed by this writer who is a Catholic writer, is Karl Marx. Marx's interest in the future.

So there are some five, or is it six, I've forgotten, characteristics of a good philosophy of education and I do believe that all of them are present in Matthew's book. Yes they are.

So if I may move on from there now to I suppose I should move on to history. Okay Matthew's history chapter and it's already been mentioned by Matthew himself, is a title *From Absence to Emancipation* he makes seriously good use of the idea of the null curriculum, the things that are recognised in curriculum studies as missing from the curriculum but really there's a strong case that they should be there and their absence in other words is noxious.

He uses also the idea of a sub-totality which is defined as a partial totality that is presenting itself as the whole story. And so for example a history class on the World War One or a history programme on World War One which represents the whole of World War One as concerned with the Western Front and neglects all its implications for the Middle East for example and there are many other examples of noxious absences or what he calls sub-totalities.

There it's not just a curriculum absence there's also absences to be deplored in pedagogy and he draws on his empirical work to indicate some of those. Some of those come from the mouths of students of history, the things that they missed. For example, not having school trips, which they do have in other subjects, indicating that the school is less serious about history than it is about other subjects.

The absence of parents in the education system and as I mentioned also the absence of communication between mosques and education, or in our case the absence of well the quality of the communication between



parishes and churches on the one hand and schools on the other. These are all well recognised issues in Catholic education.

He makes use of Nietzsche and I really quite like this, Nietzsche's three forms of history – heroic history, antiquarian history and critical history and he associates them particularly with different phases of education, with primary school education, key stage three, key stage four and he also forges a close relationship really, but it's very nuanced the way he states it, between learning history, history education and citizenship education, all of which is grist to the mill.

Now he asked me to say something, or he suggested I should say something about this idea of piety, I'm into the last minute here, can I just say, and I forgot to say this earlier that I do think that religions at any case Islam, Judaism and Christianity cannot tolerate an epistemology that is not realist in the end. I mean it has to believe in the reality of creation and the reality of human being and the reality of human agency and freedom. So it tends to go without saying that faiths, at least reasonably dogmatic faiths, are going to insist on a realist, on an ontology. Let me put it in those terms – on an ontology.

Piety, pietas was an idea I developed at one point to say if the purpose of education at large, the fundamental purpose is something like love of the world, in the case of history that would work out as love of the human past as the basic reason for doing history, as the basic value of history as a humanity, and then you get into quite a lot of need to explain various things about piety you don't mean necessarily a favouring or an exclusive favouring of those near you and of your own country you inherit that. Rather one can see piety as replicating the logic of love, the logic of charity.



And if I may just finish by saying something that I once wrote about that way back in time but Matthew picked up on it a bit, it is the logic of piety paralysed the logic of love. It is subject to a universal particular dialectic that is to say it is open to all past in principle but is committed to intense focus on particular past. However it is neither ethnocentric nor neutral in its choice of past to put too focused on it, as broad, generous and multiple criteria for selecting past to engage with. And Matthew's outline of a history curriculum that Muslim students and other students can feel at home with, can both benefit from, represents that very clearly, exemplifies that very clearly. As well as appreciative modes piety has more or less bitterly critical modes that is to say it finds itself obliged to apologise for much of its own past. That's included in the history. It is committed neither to ethnical relativism not to any sense that the present has moral superiority over the past. So it may judge with caution, with charity, and so on, it may judge but it is also open to being judged. And finally it is ethical, yes ethical plus because it includes appreciation, care responsibility, inspiration, but also includes pity, enjoyment, fascination and so on.

That was just about history.

Thank you Matthew.