Critical Realism and Qualitative Research in Psychology

Martin E. H. Willis[a]*

[a]*School of Psychology, University of East London, London, UK*

*School of Psychology

University of East London

Stratford Campus

Water Lane

E15 4LZ

m.willis@uel.ac.uk

Martin E. H. Willis is Senior Lecturer in Psychology at the University of East London. He is interested in ways in which subjectivity implicates the ongoing interplay between our bodies and the social and material contexts in which we live. This work has involved the qualitative exploration of feelings in the workplace, workplace distress (Willis, Martin E. H. (2015). *Moral Decisions, Moral Distress and the Psychological Health of Nurses* (Unpublished PhD thesis). Loughborough University), and the relationship between feeling and thinking (Cromby, J. & Willis, M.E.H. (2016). Affect – or feeling (after Leys)? *Theory & Psychology, 26*(4), 476-495). He has recently developed an interest in conspiracy beliefs (particularly around Covid-19 and vaccinations), psychological aspects of social class, and critical realism and what it can offer psychology. He co-edited (with John Cromby) a special issue of *Qualitative Research in Psychology* (2020, *17*(1)) on Qualitative Research on Affect, Emotion and Feeling.

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Abstract

Qualitative researchers wishing to circumnavigate the limitations of positivism, on the one hand, and strong constructionism, on the other, tend to be attracted to critical realism (CR), which offers a middle ground between the two: CR combines ontological realism and epistemological relativism. As a philosophical position for qualitative research, CR has been adopted by researchers utilising diverse data collection and analytic methods. However, there are at least two distinct approaches claiming the CR name: one developed by Joseph Maxwell, with qualitative research specifically in mind, and one developed by Roy Bhaskar and colleagues, as a general philosophy of natural and social sciences. In this paper I compare these two forms of CR on four dimensions, which on the surface they appear to share: (1) what does "critical" mean; (2) epistemological relativism; (3) ontological realism; (4) causality. It is obvious that, below the surface when the details are examined, the two approaches to CR differ considerably on at least the last three dimensions, if not all four. I propose four reasons for preferring Bhaskar's CR over Maxwell's CR, arguing the former is more appropriate for qualitative research in psychology.

Keywords: philosophy of science; ontology; epistemology; qualitative research; critical realism; Roy Bhaskar; Joseph Maxwell

Introduction

Realism is seeing a resurgence in the social sciences in recent years, perhaps due to the growing consensus regarding the limitations of positivism and empiricism, on the one hand, and strong forms of social constructionism and postmodernism, on the other (Gorski 2013; Pilgrim 2020).

Qualitative researchers wishing to circumnavigate those limitations tend to be attracted to critical realism (CR), which offers a middle ground between the two with its combination of ontological realism and epistemological relativism. In psychology, CR has been drawn upon for diverse reasons: for example, to support the realist position in the realism-relativism debate of the late 1990s and early 2000s (e.g., Parker 1999); in arguments against strong forms of social constructionism (Willig 1999); in arguments for the need for discursive psychology to take ontology seriously (Corcoran 2009); in theorising embodied subjectivity (Cromby 2005); in arguments for health psychology's role in promoting public health as part of a broader movement for social justice (Murray and Poland 2006); to rethink the complexity of autism (Botha 2021); and in philosophical reflection on indigenous psychology (Hwang 2015). Forms of CR, as an epistemological and ontological approach (or philosophical position) for qualitative empirical research, have also been adopted by researchers utilising diverse data collection and analytic methods: photo-elicitation (Williamson 2019); visual timelines in interviewing (Rimkeviciene et al. 2016); interpretative phenomenological analysis (Robinson and Smith 2010; Williamson 2019); discourse analysis (Riley, Sims-Schouten, and Willig 2007); and thematic analysis (Querstret and Robinson 2013; Wiltshire and Ronkainen 2021), to name just a few examples. However, as I recently discovered myself whilst trying to better understand CR, there are at least two distinct approaches that claim the moniker[1]. The first CR commonly drawn upon by qualitative researchers was developed by American professor of education Joseph Maxwell (2012) with specifically qualitative research in mind.

[1] I acknowledge that there are other approaches that are either explicitly called "critical realism" or have broadly similar ontological and epistemological positions (see Maxwell 2012, 4–5), but I have restricted my discussion to the two forms of CR that seem to have had the most impact on psychology.

I will call this Maxwellian Critical Realism (or MCR). The second CR is most closely associated with the work of Indo-British philosopher Roy Bhaskar (e.g., Bhaskar 2016) as a philosophy of both natural and social science, which I will refer to as Bhaskarian Critical Realism (or BCR).

The existence of two competing forms of CR can be problematic for qualitative researchers, particularly newcomers, trying to decide which approach to take. This paper attempts to differentiate between these two forms of CR, arguing that while MCR may be appealing because it is targeted at providing a philosophical position specifically for qualitative research, it nonetheless offers qualitative researcher's less than BCR. The latter is more consistent and richer and, I argue, a better option for qualitative research in psychology. To be clear, I am not attempting to persuade qualitative researchers to adopt CR instead of any other philosophical position – I believe others have already convincingly made that argument: for example, Pilgrim (2020) used a series of case studies to illustrate the utility of BCR for psychology; Wiltshire (2018) presented an argument for the adoption of CR in qualitative research in the pursuit of interdisciplinarity and impact; Botha (2021) argued that CR can help reinvigorate community psychology's push for impactful research and social change; and, while I find certain aspects of MCR problematic (as will become clear below), nonetheless, Maxwell (2012) convincingly argues why qualitative researchers should consider adopting CR. Instead, I am arguing that if you have already decided to adopt CR for your research, there are reasons to prefer BCR over MCR.

Maxwell's influences are diverse, encompassing philosophers such as Putnam, Salmon, Davidson and Little; social scientists such as Campbell and Sayer; the linguist Lakoff; evaluation researchers such as Pawson and Tilley; and other qualitative researchers such as Huberman, Miles and Hammersley (see Maxwell 2012, 4; 2008, 164–65). In short, Maxwell is a philosophical and theoretical magpie. While demonstrating

great erudition, I suggest this limits the consistency of MCR (examples will be given below) and thus its appeal as an ontological and epistemological approach for qualitative research in psychology. I make this claim in full knowledge of Maxwell's (2009) assertion that 'logical consistency' is an inappropriate criterion to judge a researcher's toolkit and offer the following counterargument. Philosophical positions are not merely tools amongst others in a researcher's toolkit that can be swapped for other tools (i.e., different positions are not simply interchangeable). While I do not see these positions as axiomatic either, I do see them as principles that guide the appropriate selection of research tools. You might be able to divide wood in two with a hammer, but that does not make it the appropriate tool for the job if you want a clean cut in a specific place. A guiding principle is needed for the suitable tool to be selected. Just as there is a principle behind using a saw to cut wood with a degree of precision, so philosophical positions guide the appropriate selection of research methods. I argue below, therefore, that BCR is more useful. It is a philosophical system– and thus more consistent[2] than MCRs eclectic approach – developed by Bhaskar in collaboration with a number of British social theorists, including Margaret Archer, Mervyn Hartwig, Tony Lawson, Alan Norrie, and Andrew Sayer (Gorski 2013). It should be noted that both Bhaskar and Sayer are among Maxwell's influences (see Maxwell 2012, chap. 1). However, a problem arises in Maxwell's attempt to synthesise their work with ideas taken from philosophers, such as Donald Davidson, who explicitly rejected realism (see Malpas 2019, sec. 4.4) and his attempt to appeal to social constructionists. While others (e.g., Elder-Vass 2012; Pilgrim 2020; Smith 2011) differentiate

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[2] I am by no means suggesting that Bhaskar's philosophical system is perfect. For example, Dave Elder-Vass and Timothy Rutzou have proposed several ways that BCR can be developed or improved (Elder-Vass 2010a; Rutzou 2016; 2017; Rutzou and Elder-Vass 2019).

between moderate and radical/extreme versions of constructionism and argue that the former is compatible with CR whereas the latter is not, Maxwell appears to not make this distinction and attempts to appeal to all constructionists alike.

In the remainder of this paper, I will compare and contrast these two forms of CR. First, I will discuss what is meant by "critical" within each approach. I will argue that BCR is more compatible with qualitative research that has social justice as an aim. Next, I will compare the different forms of epistemological relativism of the two CRs. While noting the appeal of MCR's epistemology, I will argue that it will fail to deliver the evidence Maxwell proposes due to its judgemental relativism – as opposed to BCR's judgemental rationality. I will then consider the ontological realism entailed by each approach. I will demonstrate that MCR's ontology is shallow and too specific compared to BCR's deep and general ontology. I will highlight how BCR's ontology might be more useful for qualitative research. I will then compare their views on causality, arguing that MCR falls into the trap of the kind of actualism that Bhaskar critiques and that BCR's theory of causality is more sophisticated and allows us to understand that all happening are multiply determined. It is my hope that in outlining these significant differences between MCR and BCR, I can show that BCR has more to offer qualitative research in psychology than MCR.

Comparison 1: What Does "Critical" Mean?

Maxwell's explicit aim was to 'come up with a version of realism that constructivists are willing to accept' (2012, viii). In so doing, Maxwell adopts an ontological realism (acknowledging a real world existing independently of any perceptions, theories or constructions) alongside a form

of epistemological constructivism and relativism (any understanding of this world is a construction from a particular perspective) (Maxwell 2012, 5). It is this combination of epistemological constructivism and ontological realism that, according to Maxwell (2012, 5), makes MCR critical. He never gives an exact definition of what this means, however. The closest Maxwell comes to defining what he means by "critical" is in a quotation of Pawson in a footnote (Maxwell 2012, 4, fn1):

> It is the "critical" element that causes confusion. … Campbell is a critical realist in a quite, quite different sense from Bhaskar and his emancipatory colleagues. For Bhaskarians criticism is warranted on the basis of the analyst's privileged understanding of the oppressive aspects of the social condition and those responsible for it. For Campbell, criticism is something that scientists apply to each other. (Pawson 2006, 20)

From this quotation, and his frequent explicit alignment with Campbell (e.g., Maxwell 2012, 4, 6, 12; 2008, 165), we can infer that Maxwell's view of what it means to be critical is the process whereby scientists analyse and evaluate each other's work. Since this is a fundamental process in science it is puzzling why anyone would feel the need to qualify their position by prefixing it with the word "critical". More importantly, though, is the mistake made in the Pawson quotation suggesting that Bhaskar's emancipatory aim is somehow separate from this process , that criticism is warranted by the analyst's privileged position. On the contrary, Bhaskar used the term in the sense that Maxwell endorses. Bhaskar's

critical realism proceeds from critiques of other philosophical and social scientific positions[3]. But "critical" is used in another sense by Bhaskarians: the aim of BCR is to work towards emancipatory social change on the basis of a social science reconstructed upon the foundation of such critiques.

Bhaskar's original aim was to construct a realist philosophy of science – beginning with a critique of existing philosophy of science traditions – and to "under-labour" for the sciences. He developed a transcendental realism[4] to account for what the world must be like for natural science to be possible (Bhaskar 1975). He then developed critical naturalism to extend transcendental realism to the social and human sciences, arguing that realism is equally applicable to investigating both the natural and human world (Bhaskar 1998b). However, Bhaskar also acknowledges that when we are studying the human world, we are studying something fundamentally different from the physical world. Consequently, we need to adopt different strategies and methods – a view long shared by qualitative researchers.

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[3] Transcendental realism is developed out of a critique of classical empiricism and transcendental idealism (Bhaskar 1975), which (to greatly simplify) gave rise in the 20th Century to logical positivism and interpretivism/social constructivism, respectively. Critical naturalism is developed out of a critique of positivism and interpretivism and seeks to resolve the dualisms prevalent in social science, namely, structure and agency, collectivism and individualism, reification and voluntarism, causes and reason, body and mind, facts and values (Bhaskar 1998b).

[4] Bhaskar begins with a criticism of the epistemic realism of positivism and hermeneutics. He then provides transcendental arguments for his ontological and epistemological positions based on what reality must be like in order for scientific knowledge to be possible.

There are three major periods in Bhaskar's development of CR: (1) original or basic critical realism (OCR), in which Bhaskar established transcendental realism and critical naturalism, which were later combined to form the term "critical realism" (Bhaskar 1975; 1998b; 1986; 2010); (2) dialectical critical realism (DCR), which builds on and adds additional tools to OCR (Bhaskar 2008; 2009); and (3) transcendental dialectical critical realism (TDCR) or metaReality (e.g., Bhaskar 2015; 2013), which is sometimes considered to be Bhaskar's "spiritual turn" (Collier 2013)[5]. As such, TDCR may be less useful for qualitative researchers than the first two periods, especially OCR. Thus, when I refer to BCR I am primarily referring to OCR. Nonetheless, Bhaskar saw his later work as subsuming and extending the work from earlier periods.

As already mentioned, Maxwell (2012, 4) himself acknowledges that aspects of BCR are compatible with his own position and draws on some of Bhaskar's arguments but, as noted above, seems to arbitrarily reject BCR's emancipatory aims. Perhaps because Maxwell, following Pawson, seems to mistake Bhaskar as adopting some kind of *a priori* position ("the analyst's privileged understanding"). However, Bhaskar's stance was quite the opposite. BCR is not critical because it is emancipatory. On the contrary, it is emancipatory because it is critical. Bhaskar believed that emancipation often can only proceed because of evidence provided by the natural, social, and human sciences. That is, human self-emancipation depends upon scientific critique (Bhaskar 1998b, 48; see also Bhaskar 1986, chap. 2). Bhaskar was an ethical naturalist, arguing that we can derive values from facts, justifying it based on explanatory critique. In short, explanatory critique is the argument that if other things

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[5] Many adherents to OCR explicitly reject TDCR, seeing it as incompatible with OCR's realist ontology (see Elder-Vass 2010a).

are equal, if something (S) is responsible for producing a false belief, one may proceed to a negative ethical evaluation of S and to a positive evaluation of action directed at its removal. So, Bhaskar's position had nothing to do with "the analyst's privileged understanding of the oppressive aspects of the social condition and those responsible for it"[6] – there is certainly no explicit mention of critique depending on such privileged understanding anywhere in Bhaskar's work. Bhaskar's arguments are about deriving values from facts, which in turn are attained through the production of scientific evidence and processes of critique: 'Science informs values and actions which in turn motivate science' (Bhaskar 1986, 172). However, 'social science is non-neutral in a double respect: it always consists in a *practical* intervention in social life and it sometimes *logically entails* value and practical judgements. In particular the possibility of a scientific *critique* of lay (and proto-scientific) ideas, grounded in explanatory practices based on a recognition of the epistemic significance of these ideas, affords to the human sciences an essential emancipatory impulse' (Bhaskar 1986, 169; italics in original). This makes Maxwell's rejection of the emancipatory aspects of BCR somewhat puzzling, because, at least to some extent, Maxwell (2009)[7] appears to share the opinion of the relationship between scientific critique and

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[6] Neither the Pawson quote nor Maxwell demonstrate any awareness of Bhaskar's explanatory critique and neither criticises it. However, following Elder-Vass (2010a), I believe that BCR can be critical in the emancipatory sense without having to follow Bhaskar's ethical naturalism.

[7] I say Maxwell appears to share this opinion to some extent because the cited chapter appears in *Qualitive Inquiry and Social Justice* (Denzin and Giardina 2009), which implies he has some concern for the issue. However, throughout the chapter he never directly addresses social justice. Instead, the chapter attempts to persuade

emancipation. So, it is not clear why he feels the need to reject this aspect of BCR. It is perhaps due to his ambivalent relationship with critical theory. Maxwell is happy to endorse 'the emphasis that critical theory places on the influence that social and economic conditions have on beliefs and ideologies' (2012, 21). But, whereas Bhaskar explicitly draws upon Marx, Maxwell stresses that his endorsement of critical theory does not mean that MCR is Marxist. Either way, we arrive at our first (albeit relatively minor) reason for preferring BCR over MCR: if social justice and human emancipation are a potential end goal for qualitative research, BCR is arguably more appropriate than MCR because Bhaskar (1986; 2008; 2013) explicitly makes these aims central to his philosophy.

In summary, what makes MCR and BCR critical is perhaps the least significant difference between them. Both CRs are critical because they involve critique in the ongoing academic/scientific debate. But this does not mean that MCR and BCR do not differ at all in this regard. BCR proposes that such critique has potential for an emancipatory or social justice agenda, especially when combined with research evidence, whereas MCR places little, if any, emphasis on emancipation or social justice. Both forms of CR also involve the combination of ontological realism with epistemological relativism, the details of which will be explored in the following sections.

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qualitative researchers to accept that evidence needs to be taken seriously (especially in the context of evidence-based practice and policy) and that MCR is a suitable vehicle for producing evidence through qualitative research.

Comparison 2: Epistemological Relativism

Even though the two versions of CR both posit epistemological relativism, there are important differences between them. BCR's (Bhaskar 1975; 1998b) epistemological relativism is based on the premise that 'knowledge is a social product, produced by means of antecedent social products' (1975, 16). In other words, we construe, reflect upon and talk about the real (physical, social and psychological) world in which we live. As Pilgrim notes,

> Those construals might be fanciful and idiosyncratic tastes and assertions (e.g. the view that heavy metal exemplifies good music) or profound and serious (e.g. the passion for proving, with evidence, the reality of global warming and campaigning about its dire consequences for the survival of humanity). Heavy metal exists but people hold different views about its merits and its definition and range of indicative bands. Global warming exists but people debate its sources, consequences and degree of threat. Some construals will be honest and persuasive (e.g. persistent inequalities in health mean the poor will be sicker and die younger than the rich on average) or dishonest and unfounded (e.g. there are no health inequalities only 'health variations' and being healthy is merely a matter of personal choice). (2020, 3–4)

From this perspective, then, epistemological relativism is not simply the same as truth relativism or judgemental relativism. As a result of our socialisation in a culture, construals may change over time and vary from place to place. Thus, knowledge is both socially contingent and fallible, but truth is still independent of 'historical specificities in systems of belief' (Elder-Vass 2012, 231). For example, "the Earth and planets revolve around the Sun" is a statement of truth. Prior to the Copernican revolution in the 16th Century geocentrism, which placed the Earth at the centre of the universe, was the dominant belief but the planets have always revolved around the Sun. If it is true that the planets revolve around the Sun

– which appears to be the case – it will continue to be true, and the planets will continue to revolve around the Sun, if the human species becomes extinct. To give a psychological example, "psychological distress is a common response to trauma" is a statement of truth. However, just how such distress is best understood (e.g., as primarily biological, psychological, social, or some combination of all three) is still debated across multiple disciplines including, but not limited to, psychology and psychiatry. As these examples indicate, construals (even academic ones) are socially situated and to some extent will reflect the context in which they are produced. An 'emphasis on empirical evidence, theoretical coherence or methodological transparency and rigour might *improve their claim* to superior knowledge' (Pilgrim 2020, 4; italics in original), but academic construals can still be sceptically challenged because knowledge is fallible. Knowledge can still be differentially closer or farther from the truth, however, because truth is *alethic* – '[a] proposition is true if and only if the state of affairs that it expresses (describes) is real' (Bhaskar 1975, 249; see also Alston 1996; Sayer 2000; Smith 2011, 207–19).

According to Bhaskar (1998a), judgemental rationality – the capacity to weigh up what is likely to be true in a particular context – allows us to compare construals (e.g., competing explanations) and decide which one is most likely to be true. These kinds of rational judgements might be tentative and cautious because of the fallibility of knowledge, but they can, and sometimes must, be made if we are to avoid judgemental relativism (Pilgrim 2020), whereby all construals are given equal merit and any attempt to adjudicate between them is abandoned (i.e., the kind of relativism that Parker 1999 convincingly argued against). As Groff puts it, '[i]f all beliefs about the world are equally valid, then no claims may be challenged' (2004, 1). On my reading, this is precisely the kind of judgemental relativism to which MCR subscribes.

Maxwell explicitly states that 'our *understanding* of this world is inevitably a construction from our own perspectives and standpoint' and 'there is no possibility of attaining a … "correct" understanding of the world' (2012, 5; italics in original). He repeatedly stresses that 'there are different valid *perspectives* on reality' (2012, 9; italics in original) and that 'constructions can be more or less adequate' (2012, 20). But Maxwell does not really explain how we might judge between a valid perspective/adequate construction and an invalid perspective/inadequate construction (what Pilgrim respectively called "honest and persuasive" and "dishonest and unfounded" construals in the quotation above). The closest Maxwell comes to this is by stating that

> [t]he world as we perceive it and therefore live in it is structured by our concepts, which are to a substantial extent expressed in language. Critical realism … holds that these concepts and perspectives, as held by the people we study as well as by ourselves, are *part of* [original italics] the world that we want to understand, and that *our understanding of these perspectives can be more or less correct* [italics added]. (Maxwell 2012, 9)

But even here, it is not that construals of the world (i.e., people's perspectives) themselves can be more or less correct; rather, it is our second order construal of first order construals (i.e., our interpretation or understanding of people's perspectives) that can be differentially accurate. While Maxwell's epistemological argument may be accepted by social constructionists and/or be appealing to other qualitative researchers, as he intended, it is less satisfactory for Bhaskarian critical realists for at least two reasons:

(1) At best, Maxwell may have struggled to articulate his views on epistemological relativism or, perhaps, was never challenged to think about it enough to develop his ideas with more clarity. At worst, MCR seems to retreat into judgemental or truth relativism in the attempt to gain acceptance among social constructionists. This is significant because MCR cannot ever provide the kind of convincing evidence Maxwell hopes it can (Maxwell 2009; 2012, chap. 8). Evidence is defined as the 'available body of facts or information indicating whether a belief or proposition is true or valid' (Lexico 2021). But, if all perspectives are equally valid and truth is relative, then the concept of evidence becomes meaningless – a matter of whose truth and whose evidence, and their acceptance becomes little more than faith.

(2) Consequently, it is not entirely clear what difference realism (ontology) makes if all judgements of it (epistemology) are equally valid. In the 'post-truth' era it is increasingly important, ethically speaking, to demonstrate when a perspective or construal is dishonest and unfounded (McIntyre 2018). Otherwise we are left with a socio-political quagmire in which, for example, prejudice and discrimination can be reduced to a "difference of opinion/perspective" and outright lies can be presented as "alternative facts" (d'Ancona 2017).

Here, then, is our second reason to prefer BCR over MCR: truth matters, and judgemental rationality can help us discern which perspective or construal is closer to the truth. This requires a balancing act between false claims of disinterestedness (positivism) on one side and virtue signalling or grandstanding on the other (postmodernism) – empirical detachment is easier in the natural than in the social sciences, but with

epistemic humility and reflexivity we can still to an extent (or at least do our best to) exercise it in our research.[8]. So, even where the two forms

of critical realism are, on the surface, most similar there remains significant difference between their respective epistemological positions.

However, perhaps the greatest divergence between them is in terms of their ontological realism.

Comparison 3: Ontological Realism

Both forms of CR take the position that reality exists independently of any perception, thought, construction, or knowledge. That is, that there is

a reality that has existence outside of human minds or social activity. Both CRs hold that even social constructions can have a (emergent) reality

(see Elder-Vass 2010; 2012; Maxwell 2012, chap. 2). However, as with epistemological relativism, there are important differences between the

ontologies of MCR and BCR. I will now demonstrate how MCR's ontology is specific and shallow or flat compared to BCR's general, deep and

stratified/laminated ontology.

MCR's ontological focus, unsurprisingly given Maxwell's primary concern with qualitative research, is on the specific real existence of

meaning, mind, culture, and diversity (2012, chaps. 2 & 4). This specificity makes the task of deciphering what, if any, general ontological views

Maxwell holds – beyond the principle of mind independence – more difficult. However, it does seem that Maxwell regards ontology to be

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[8] I thank the anonymous reviewer who pointed this out to me.

relatively unitary or flat (i.e., existing in the same domain or at the same level – e.g., "Culture is not a 'level'"; Maxwell 2012, 27–28; see also discussion on ontology of culture, below).

Maxwell (2012, 16–17) proposes a realist understanding of mind that sees mental and physical entities as interacting parts of a single world. This view is opposed to dualism, which sees mind and the physical world as 'separate, independent, and irreducible entities with nothing in common', and physicalism, which sees 'everything that actually exists' as 'physical, and mental phenomena will eventually be reduced to physical—e.g., neurological—entities and processes' (Maxwell 2012, 15)[9]. According to MCR, mental[10] phenomena are 'inextricably involved in the causal processes that produce behavior and social phenomena' and, as such, are essential to causal explanation in the social sciences (for more on MCR's approach to causality see the discussion below). The reality of meaning and mind are further posited by Maxwell:

> Concepts, meanings, and intentions are as real as rocks; they are just not as accessible to direct observation and description as rocks. In this, they are like quarks, black holes, the meteor impact that supposedly killed off the dinosaurs, or William Shakespeare: we have no way of

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[9] This anti-reductionism is another thing that MCR and BCR have in common, but BCR has a fuller explanation for why reductionism should be avoided in terms of emergence (see below).

[10] It should be noted that Maxwell (2012, 16) often uses scare quotes when talking about "meaning" and "mental" phenomena. This way of writing has become *de riguer* in postmodernist and constructionist writing to demonstrate that a phenomenon or entity is socially constructed and could be otherwise. Arguably, Maxwell's use of such scare quotes somewhat undermines his realist ontological arguments.

directly observing them, and our claims about them are based on a variety of sorts of indirect evidence (including verbal behavior). (2012, 16)

Nonetheless, Maxwell argues that statements about entities that belong to this mental framework are as testable, in principle, by scientific methods as 'statements about other hypothesised or inferred entities that are not subject to direct observation' (2012, 16). However, according to Maxwell, there is the added advantage with mental phenomena that we may be able to gain additional information about them through introspection.

MCR further postulates that individuals' physical contexts also have causal influence on their beliefs and perspectives. 'From a realist perspective, not only are both individuals' perspectives and their situations real phenomena, they are *separate* phenomena that causally interact with one another' (Maxwell 2012, 20; italics in original). This position is in contradistinction to positivists or post-positivists who might dismiss the significance of individual perspectives or "operationalise" them as behavioural or attitude variables, and constructionists who might deny any causal influence. Thus, a major benefit of MCR is that it provides a framework for aiding our understanding of the relationship between people's standpoints and their actual situations (this is also a valuable feature of BCR).

From the perspective of MCR, understanding the causal interaction between individuals' perspectives (meanings, beliefs, motives and so on) and their situations entails recognising that situations consist of both the material circumstances in which people exist and the cultural resources that provide them with ways of making sense of those circumstances. Consequently, Maxwell delineates a theory of culture as integral

to MCR. While it is beyond the scope of this paper to fully discuss this theory in detail, I note that it has three key ontological aspects. First, culture is seen as real rather than as an abstraction from behavioural observations. However, since 'culture refers to mental and symbolic entities, rather than physical or behavioral ones, its characteristics must be inferred rather than observed or "abstracted" from observations' (Maxwell 2012, 26). Secondly, culture is not a "level" within a hierarchical relationship to other levels such as social structure, personality, and biology. While culture and social structure may have a higher degree of organisation than the individual, this does not imply a hierarchical/control relationship. Culture and social structure are deeply entangled and causal relationships between them run in both directions. Thirdly, culture is not necessarily shared. This is because

> Culture cannot be restricted to a set of *shared* concepts, symbols, and beliefs. A culture is a *system* of individuals' conceptual/meaningful structures (minds) found in a given social system, and is not intrinsically shared, but participated in … although sharing is one *possible* form of participation, it is not the only one. Culture cannot be represented by a model on the same scale as the individual, i.e., as a "shared" set of meanings or beliefs that could be held by a single individual, but requires a model at a higher level of complexity. (Maxwell 2012, 28; italics in original)

In other words, rather than culture consisting in "the replication of uniformity" it entails an "organisation of diversity". Similarity (i.e., shared beliefs and values) is not the basis of culture. Rather, culture is a system of 'different beliefs and values that are connected through interaction' (Maxwell 2012, 29). Thus, diversity is real as opposed to being simply a consequence of categorisation.

MCR offers a specific or scientific ontology. That is, it posits the reality of objects particular to an academic discipline or to the social sciences. As such, it could easily be read as social theory rather than philosophy of science or a philosophical position from which to conduct research, qualitative or otherwise. This could be a result, at least in part, of Maxwell's attempt to appeal to constructionists, his express concern for qualitative research in his discipline of education studies, or both. At the very least, because it is a scientific ontology, MCR's ontology is relatively inflexible – because it says very little about the reality of anything outside of meaning, mind, culture, and diversity researchers are left with no ontology underpinning anything other than these select objects. Much of MCR's scientific ontology is compatible with BCR, but is restricted to considering a specific set of entities and does not recognise the ontological depth that BCR, as a philosophical ontology, does. That is, BCR posits the nature of reality in general and thus goes much further than MCR.

In *A Realist Theory of Science*, Bhaskar (1975) set out to answer the question "what must the world be like for science to be possible?" In so doing, he developed transcendental realism, which

> regards the objects of knowledge as the structures and mechanisms that generate phenomena; and the knowledge as produced in the social activity of science. These objects are neither phenomena (empiricism) nor human constructs imposed on the phenomena (idealism [or constructionism]), but real structures which endure and operate independently of our knowledge, our experience and the conditions which allow us to access them (Bhaskar 1975, 25).

In short, reality exists independently of human activity. This separation is emphasised in Bhaskar's insistence that reality consists of three nested domains: the *real*, the *actual*, and the *empirical*, as represented in Table 1. Structures and mechanisms are real and distinct from the events that they generate; events, too, are real and distinct from the experiences in which they are apprehended. In other words, the empirical domain of experiences can apprehend events occurring in the actual domain, but it cannot ever fully capture all of the events in the actual domain because experience is bounded by, what phenomenologists call, our phenomenal horizon (Dreyfus and Taylor 2015). Put another way, if a tree falls in the woods without anyone there to observe it, the tree still falls. While actual events are generated by the structures and mechanisms of the domain of the real, the domain of the real is greater than the actual domain because it also includes unactualized or potential mechanisms that are not currently active. For example, an acorn has the potential to sprout and grow into a mighty oak, but this mechanism will only be actualised under certain conditions. Similarly, the acorn has the potential to be converted into energy when ingested by a squirrel, but this mechanism will only be actualised if it is actually eaten by a squirrel. So, the empirical domain is nested within the actual domain, which in turn is nested within the real domain. This nesting is often thought of as a laminated or stratified ontology. With Wiltshire, I want to suggest that "thinking [with] the idea of a stratified ontology permits researchers to acknowledge a sense of realism in spite of the obvious interpretive epistemic processes at hand" (2018,

532)[11]. It also goes further than MCR in accounting for the reality of certain entities or processes while, nonetheless, they remain unobservable, especially when we consider that Bhaskar and others have demonstrated that this ontology is applicable and relevant to human and social phenomena (e.g., Bhaskar 1998b; Elder-Vass 2012; Pilgrim 2020; Smith 2011). While the social world is recognised as being concept- and activity-dependent it is also posited to be part of the natural world. Social structures pre-exist individuals and 'enable or constrain human activities, which are in turn … causally efficacious in the material world' (Bhaskar 2014, ix). Since we are simultaneously conceptual *and* material beings, social life is never reducible to its concept-dependence alone.

<Table 1 here>

Furthermore, according to Pilgrim, BCR "can be positioned within the tradition of Heraclitus who said that reality was in constant flux" (2020, 7; see also Rutzou 2016; Rutzou and Elder-Vass 2019). In other words, BCR does not view reality as fixed or unmoving. Rather, BCR 'emphasises the emergence of events and processes in the world based on prior forces, powers, causes or generative mechanisms' (Pilgrim 2020, 7; see also Bhaskar 1998b; Elder-Vass 2012). Indeed, emergence is an important aspect of BCR's ontology. As Bhaskar argues, 'social objects are irreducible to (and really emergent from) natural objects' and consequently 'cannot be studied in the same way as them' (1998b, 20). Bhaskar

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[11] As Wiltshire (2018, 532) notes, this stratified ontology is problematic for critics of critical realism, most notably because talk of reality beyond our knowledge claims (ontic claims) often slides into talk about knowing reality (epistemic claims). Nonetheless, Wiltshire suggests that judgemental rationality can lead to useful, for-the-time-being, conclusions (see also Smith 2011, chap. 2).

consistently argues against reductionism, emphasising that societies are not simply aggregates of individuals nor are people merely more or less complex things: "the subject-matter of sociology is [not] (reducible to) that of psychology … and … the subject-matter of psychology is [not] (reducible to) that of neurophysiology and ultimately physics, systematizing the principles governing the behaviour of inanimate matter" (Bhaskar 1998b, 97).

BCR advocates *synchronic emergent powers materialism* (SEPM) in contrast to other forms of materialism, which collapse mental powers to their physical basis or conditions of possibility, and to behaviourism, which collapses mental powers to their overt exercise or conditions of identification (i.e., observable behaviour or stimulus-response reflexes) (see Bhaskar 1998b, 97–98). New characteristics or capacities emerge at higher levels of systemic organisation than lower ones (Pilgrim 2020), which means that the entities and processes that exist at this higher level of systemic organisation are more than the sum of their parts. For example, brain structures are more than the neurons that make them up, brains are more than the multiple structures of which they consist, organs are more than their cells, bodies are more than their organs, people are more than their brains and bodies, and so on (see Smith 2011). Emergence is implicit in Maxwell's (2012) arguments about culture (in terms of higher levels of complexity in organisation) discussed above, but his arguments are never explicitly developed in this direction. By contrast, emergence is central to BCR's ontology.

Another important ontological aspect of BCR, which has epistemological and methodological implications, is the recognition that all biological systems (and the world more generally) are open systems. However, what makes humans special forms of such open systems is that

one of the inputs to them, which can modulate stasis or change, includes the emergent property of (both individual and collective) personal

agency (Pilgrim 2020). But agency is not all important and does not imply the kind of voluntarism found in some forms of humanistic

psychology. A person may make certain choices, but the conditions of those choices are often beyond their control, or they may not fully

understand them. 'Moreover, in open systems probability and trends apply but the predictability of events does not' (Pilgrim 2020, 7). The

recognition that humans and the world are open systems has implications for psychological research. When psychologists, relying on the

laboratory, control out factors that apply in the real world they are essentially producing a closed system. As a result, they may generate dubious

data, misleading forms of explanations and false predictions. BCR calls this the problem of transduction. While it is a possible reason for the

recent replicability crisis in psychology and some might see it as another motive for preferring qualitative over quantitative methods, it is

important to acknowledge that BCR does not entirely reject quantitative human research (Ackroyd and Karlsson 2014). Rather, BCR views

quantitative findings cautiously, as no more generalisable or universal than those of qualitative research. However, as Price and Martin note,

> hermeneutically based methodologies are the starting point of critical realist research. This is because, unlike in the natural sciences, language
>
> provides an 'inside' or 'interior' to social life […] We can only investigate this interior by engaging with it hermeneutically. The consequence of this
>
> starting point is that critical realist social [and psychological] research is characteristically associated with methodologies that are typically considered
>
> to be qualitative or focussed on meaning. (2018, 92)

So, BCR provides a laminated understanding of ontology, which distinguishes between the real, the actual, and the empirical, and acknowledges emergence, emergent properties, and emergent entities, which exist at a higher level of organisation than the parts from they emerge. It is, therefore, a depth ontology. By contrast, MCR gives us a flat ontology that explicitly rejects the idea of a stratified or laminated reality and fails to fully recognise the role emergence plays in it. Furthermore, BCR sees people and the world as open systems, which makes prediction difficult. Our third reason for preferring BCR is derived from these ontological differences: BCR offers us a much more complex, flexible and more useful philosophical position for qualitative research than does MCR. The distinction between the empirical, the actual and the real is useful for qualitative researchers who wish to acknowledge that the 'text' (the empirical) is not all there is and to consider their qualitative data in relation to various levels of existence (from the biological, to the individual, the social, the cultural, political, economic and so on)[12] that are not explicitly referred to or present in that empirical data. While this is not unique to BCR, and other philosophical approaches consider the importance of context, BCR does provide the conceptual framework to articulate the non-empirical domains of reality that can impact upon and shape the empirical data we collect. Moreover, the concepts of emergence, emergent properties, and emergent entities are also useful. Importantly, participant experiences, thoughts, opinions and beliefs, feelings and emotions, and so on will have emerged from, but not be

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[12] The systems of Bronfenbrenner's (1979; Bronfenbrenner and Ceci 1994) ecological system's theory and bioecological model of development (biopsychological, microsystem, mesosystem, exosystem, macrosystem, and chronosystem) might be useful in thinking further about the levels of reality relevant to qualitative research in psychology.

reducible to, a particular assemblage of multiple elements (e.g., biological, social, cultural, economic, etc.). This is a very good reason to avoid

the kind of discursive or linguistic determinism/reductionism often associated with some forms of social constructionism and further points to the

need to account for significant aspects of the context not immediately apparent in the data (see, e.g., Sims-Schouten and Riley 2014).

Furthermore, if qualitative researchers wish to participate in interdisciplinary research, an understanding of the emergent levels of human

existence may prove fruitful (a point notably absent from Wiltshire's otherwise strongly argued case for adopting CR in the pursuit of

interdisciplinarity; 2018).

Comparison 4: Causality

Causality is somewhat of a dirty word in the qualitative psychology research community, perhaps because of its association with positivist (and

post-positivist)/empiricist quantitative research. However, from a CR perspective, causality is very much seen as an important issue with which

all research approaches need to contend. For clarity, I will briefly outline the positivist/empiricist ('regularity' or 'successionist') view of

causality before contrasting it with the views of MCR and BCR. The positivist/empiricist view was derived from Hume's analysis of causality, as

elaborated by J. S. Mill and others in the 19th and 20th centuries. Hume argued that causal relationships cannot be directly perceived. What we

can perceive, however, is what he called the "constant conjunction" of events. According to Hume, we cannot have any knowledge of causality

beyond regularities in associations between events (i.e., when B always follows A, we associate A as causing B), and we should not infer

unobservable entities or mechanisms as causing such regularities. Hempel and Oppenheim (1948), key figures in the logical positivist movement,

systematised this idea in the "deductive-nomological" theory of causation. From this perspective, science is seeking 'laws and principles of the utmost generality' (Salmon 1989, 182). Consequently, scientific explanation involves fitting specific facts into a framework of laws. This "covering law" approach was the dominant view of causality in philosophy of science for most of the 20th century (Salmon 1989). As Maxwell notes,

> Mohr … labeled this approach to causal explanation "variance theory"; it defines causality as a consistent relationship between variables. It treats the actual process of causality as unobservable, a "black box", and focuses on discovering whether there is a systematic relationship between inputs and outputs. In this view, causal inference requires both some sort of systematic comparison of situations in which the presumed causal factor is present or absent, or varies in strength, and the implementation of controls on other possible explanatory variables. Mohr argued that "the variance-theory model of explanation in social science has a close affinity to statistics. The archetypal rendering of this idea of causality is the linear or nonlinear regression model" … and that this conception of causality is "the basis of ordinary quantitative research and of the stricture that we need comparison in order to establish causality". (Mohr 1982 and 1996, cited in Maxwell 2012, 34)

A common interpretation of this line of thinking is that only quantitative methods (e.g., experimentation, t-tests, analysis of variance, regression analysis, etc.) can lead to causal conclusions. This led to the establishment of randomised controlled trials as the "gold standard" for causal explanation. Accompanying this is the idea that qualitative methods are limited to, at best, suggesting causal hypotheses, which can later be tested using quantitative methods, or to providing supporting data for quantitative research (e.g., Shavelson and Towne 2002, cited in Maxwell 2012, 35; see also Maxwell 2004; Chirkov and Anderson 2018a; 2018b). Many qualitative researchers reacted to this "regularity" conception by

denying that causality is even a valid concept in the social sciences. Both forms of CR stand in stark contrast to both the "regularity" view of causality and the rejection of the concept of causality altogether.

In contrast to the "regularity" model of causation, MCR adopts a "process theory", which sees causality in terms of events and the processes that connect them. Instead of viewing causation in terms of constant conjunctions *à la* Hume, process theory is based on analysing how some events influence others through causal processes. The focus here is on specific events and processes and process theory is therefore less amenable to statistical approaches and much better suited to the 'in-depth study of one or a few cases or a relatively small sample of individuals, and to textual forms of data that retain the chronological and contextual connections between events' (Maxwell 2012, 36). In other words, the process theory of causality requires qualitative methods.

This approach is no less explanatory than the regularity approach; it is simply a different approach to explanation. Maxwell (2012) argues that by using qualitative methods with a process theory of causation, causal processes can often be directly investigated through observation of social settings and interviews with participants. He cites numerous qualitative researchers who, he suggests, adopt this process view of causation (see Maxwell 2012, 37–38). Furthermore, according to Maxwell, the MCR understanding of causality provides a philosophical rationale for 'the ways in which qualitative researchers typically approach explanation, whether they explicitly use the term "cause" or not' (2012, 38). For MCR, there are three key aspects of qualitative research that are significant for the process theory of causality: identifying causality in case study; the crucial role of context in causal explanation; the legitimacy of individuals' beliefs, values, motives, and meanings as causes. These three aspects

are compatible with BCR but, while I commend Maxwell's acknowledgement that qualitative researchers often implicitly provide causal explanations even when explicitly avoiding the term "cause" (usually preferring to use terms such as 'influenced by', 'shaped by', "impacted by", "dependent on", and so on), I nevertheless believe that his understanding of causality is too limited.

The BCR view of causality is more complicated than that of MCR. As noted in the discussion of ontological realism above, BCR adopts a view of ontology involving three domains – the empirical, the actual, and the real – with generative mechanisms and structures in the domain of the real causing events in the domain of the actual. This means that there is independence of causal structures and generative mechanisms from the patterns of events they produce. As Bhaskar puts it,

> once it is granted that mechanisms and structures may be said to be real, we can provide an interpretation of the independence of causal laws from the patterns of events […] For the real basis of this independence lies in the independence of the generative mechanisms of nature from the events they generate. Such mechanisms endure even when not acting; and act in their normal way even when the consequents of the law-like statements they ground are, owing to the operation of intervening mechanisms or countervailing causes, unrealized (1975, 46)

Besides the already noted independence of generative mechanisms from the events they generate, there are three important aspects of the BCR view of causality contained in this quotation. First, generative mechanisms continue to exist, albeit in virtual or potential form, even when they are not actively producing events. Second, generative mechanisms act in their normal way even if the events they normally produce are not actualised. Third, actual events are multiply determined – the consequence of interacting generative mechanisms – and the actual pattern of

events is contingent upon which mechanisms are active and how those mechanisms influence each other; some mechanisms can even interrupt and prevent the consequences of other mechanisms. No effect ever has a single cause. Moreover, as Elder-Vass notes, generative mechanisms (sometimes shortened to mechanisms)

> are particular to specific kinds of entities because they depend on the entity having a particular kind of parts, organised in such a way that the process that produces the power concerned can occur. Mechanisms, in other words, depend on the composition and structure of the entities concerned. To be more precise, they depend on (i) the set of parts; (ii) the powers of those parts; (iii) the set of relations between these parts that are characteristic (and definitive) of entities of this type.
>
> When they depend not just on the parts of the entity possessing them, but also on the relations between those parts that only obtain when they make up a whole of this type, these powers are *emergent properties* of the things possessing them (2012, 17).

In other words, causal powers or generative mechanisms may be the result of processes of emergence, which returns us to the centrality of emergence in BCR.

As should be apparent, the BCR view of causality is like the MCR view in that it too adopts a process approach. However, it differs in terms of the complexity of causality and in seeing that causation can often only be inferred rather than directly investigated: generative mechanisms and structures do not usually operate in the domain of the empirical but the actual patterns of events they generate may be experienced and observed. In this regard, BCR offers researchers two distinct explanatory or abductive inferential logics, *retroduction* and

retrodiction, both of which allow researchers to move from the empirical to the real. Retrodiction is the process of identifying causal powers. 'We may need to observe partial empirical regularities – what Lawson calls *demi-regularities* or *demi-regs* (Lawson 1997: 204-9) – in order to be able to hypothesise these' (Elder-Vass 2010, 48). Analysing demi-regs then allows us to 'theorise the existence of underlying causal mechanisms that are responsible, subject to circumstances, for the observable degree of regularity' (ibid.) O'Mahoney and Vincent (2014), suggest that the researcher should identify patterns in different contexts and over a period of time and then ask "what if?" in an attempt to identify often hidden causal mechanisms. Retrodiction is the process of explaining specific events by identifying 'the set of causal powers that interacted to produce them and how they affected each other' (Elder-Vass 2010, 48). This is useful for qualitative research because it provides, on the one hand, an ontological basis for making inferences about unobserved or unobservable entities or processes (e.g., thoughts, feelings, reasons, experience, social class, other features of the context or situation, etc.) that are nevertheless real and have impacted on what we have observed or can observe (e.g., a person's actions or talk), and on the other hand, can help us provide explanations (as opposed to just descriptions) for the content of our data.

As with ontology, BCR's view of causality is more complex than MCR's but also, I suggest, more realistic and more useful. While MCR's process theory of causality does overcome some of the problems of the simplistic "regularity" (or "constant conjunctions") view of causation, it nonetheless, in my reading at least, continues to perpetuate the kind of actualism that Bhaskar (1975, chap. 2) critiques in the regularity view of causality: 'the idea that [causes] are relations between events or states of affairs (which are thought to constitute the objects of

actual or possible experiences)' (ibid., 64). In understanding causality in terms of events and the processes that connect them, Maxwell appears to

hold a very similar view to the positivists he criticises. It is also a very simplistic notion of causes, especially when compared to BCR which

develops a theory of causation that is more than events and the processes that connect them. The acknowledgement that all entities possess

particular causal powers (generative mechanisms) due to the particular structure and composition of that entity, that these powers or mechanisms

can be emergent properties, and that all events are multiply determined – no actual event is ever caused by a single cause – shifts our attention

away from events and the processes that connect them to the generative mechanisms and causal powers that, when actualised, give rise to events.

It also recognises that mechanisms continue to be real even when not active (i.e., as potentials) or when their usual tendency is restricted or

blocked by another mechanism. This leads us to a fourth, and final, reason for preferring BCR over MCR: BCR's theory of causality is more

sophisticated than MCR's and allows us to realise that causes are never simply a matter of a single event resulting in a singular effect or event

and causal mechanisms may lay dormant as potentialities. This has important implications for qualitative research: researchers need to attempt to

capture the complexity of the contexts of participants' experiences, thoughts, opinions and beliefs, feelings and emotions, and so on if we wish to

understand how they have become the way they are, how they have been formed and shaped. As suggested above, BCR provides two important

inferential logics (retrodiction and retroduction) to aid researchers in this respect.

Conclusion

This paper has compared and contrasted two versions of CR, what I have called Maxwellian CR and Bhaskarian CR. Discussion has focused on

four comparisons, which at first seem to unite MCR and BCR, but which, upon closer inspection, separate them: what is meant by "critical"; epistemological relativism; ontological realism; and causality. With each comparison, I have proposed a reason for preferring BCR over MCR. These four comparisons and reasons for preferring BCR are summarised in Table 2.

<Table 2 here>

I am not denying that MCR has appeal or that it has been influential in qualitative research. Google Scholar indicates that *A Realist Approach for Qualitative Research* (Maxwell 2012) has been cited more than 1,800 times. While many of these citations are not in papers reporting empirical research, a lot of them are. It is for some researchers all they know or need to know about CR. However, I argue that when CR is recruited just by reference to MCR alone it is limited. CR is frequently reduced to the claim of ontological realism and epistemological relativism (e.g., Rimkeviciene et al. 2016; Ronkainen et al. 2015; Walker et al. 2015)[13] without considering the details of these positions. As such, CR's specific realist ontology is conflated with realism more generally (and sometimes, by critics, with positivism). That is, it appears that when some researchers claim a CR position its ontology is reduced to the idea that there is a reality outside of and separate from language without any significant regard for what that reality might be like. This can result in analyses that do not go beyond the 'text' of the data (e.g., the interview or focus group transcript, ethnographic observations, etc.) to connect the data with real structures, mechanisms, and processes that are

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[13] In my experience, this reduction of CR is also very common in student dissertations and theses at both undergraduate and postgraduate levels.

not immediately apparent in the data itself or not available to direct observation. As I hope to have shown above, BCR is much richer than this and is therefore more useful than MCR for qualitative research in psychology.

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Table 1. The three nested domains of reality (adapted from Bhaskar 1975, 56)(adapted from Bhaskar 1975, 56)(adapted from Bhaskar 1975, 56)(adapted from Bhaskar 1975, 56)(adapted from Bhaskar 1975, 56)(adapted from Bhaskar 1975, 56)(adapted from Bhaskar 1975, 56)(adapted from Bhaskar 1975, 56)(adapted from Bhaskar 1975, 56)(adapted from Bhaskar 1975, 56)(adapted from Bhaskar 1975, 56)(adapted from Bhaskar 1975, 56)(adapted from Bhaskar 1975, 56)(adapted from Bhaskar 1975, 56)(adapted from Bhaskar 1975, 56)(adapted from Bhaskar 1975, 56)(adapted from Bhaskar 1975, 56)

	Domain of empirical	Domain of actual	Domain of real
Mechanisms			✓
Events		✓	✓
Experiences	✓	✓	✓

Table 2. Comparison of Maxwell's and Bhaskar's versions of CR

Comparison	Maxwell	Bhaskar	Reason for preferring BCR
1. Meaning of 'critical'	The process whereby scientists analyse and evaluate each other's work.	Working towards emancipatory social change on the basis of a social science reconstructed upon the foundation of CR.	BCR's emancipatory aims make it more appropriate than MCR, if social justice and human emancipation are an end goal for qualitative research[14].
2. Epistemological relativism	Knowledge is constructed from a particular perspective. All "truths" are relative to such perspectives. There is no possibility of reaching a "correct" understanding of the world.	Knowledge is a social product, produced by means of antecedent social products. However, is not relative; rather, it is alethic. Judgemental rationality can be used to compare explanations and decide which one is most likely to be true.	Truth matters, and judgemental rationality can help us discern which perspective on, or construal of, the world is closer to the truth.
3. Ontological realism	Reality exists independently of minds, theories, perspectives or social constructions. Everything that is real exists at the same level. Meaning, mind, culture, and diversity are real.	Reality exists independently of minds, theories, perspectives or social constructions. Although social reality is concept- and activity-dependent, it remains a part of the natural world and is thus independent of any individual	BCR offers a much more complex, flexible and useful ontology for qualitative research than does MCR because it is a general/philosophical ontology whereas MCR is a specific/scientific ontology.

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[14] I realise this is a relatively weak argument and by itself would not be sufficient to prefer BCR over MCR. However, I believe the remaining three reasons are sufficient.

		knower. Humans are material as well as conceptual beings. Reality is laminated or stratified – there are multiple levels of reality. Structures and mechanisms are real and distinct from the events that they generate; events, too, are real and distinct from the experiences in which they are apprehended. Some entities and properties are emergent and exist at a higher level of organisation from and not reducible to the things from which they emerge.	
4. Causality	A "process theory", which sees causality in terms of events and the processes that connect them.	Entities possess particular causal powers (generative mechanisms) due to the particular structure and composition of that entity. These powers or mechanisms can be emergent properties. All events are multiply determined – no actual event is ever caused by a single cause.	BCR's theory of causality is more sophisticated than MCR's theory of causation and allows us to realise that causes are never simply a matter of single event resulting in a singular effect or leading to another single event, and that causal mechanisms may lay dormant as potentialities