CHARLES UNIVERSITY IN PRAGUE

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INTERNATIONAL ECONOMIC AND POLITICAL STUDIES

MASTER'S THESIS

HOW POLITICAL GEOGRAPHY CAN CHALLENGE DUBIOUS SOCIO-SPATIAL PRACTICES

DEVELOPING TRANSCENDENTAL PHRONETIC POLITICAL GEOGRAPHY

Author: Niklaas Baudet von Gersdorff, B.Sc.

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Supervisor: RNDr. Jan Kofroň, Ph.D.

Date Submitted: 13th May 2016

Declaration

I hereby declare that this thesis is my own work, based on the sources and literature listed in the appended bibliography. The thesis as submitted is 244 627 keystrokes long (including spaces), i.e. 136 manuscript pages.

Niklaas Baudet von Gersdorff, B.Sc.	Date

Original thesis project

On the next pages follows a reprint of the original thesis project as submitted on 13th May 2015.

Thesis Project

Niklaas Baudet von Gersdorff*

13th May 2015

This paper outlines topic and research approach for my Masters' Thesis in Geopolitical Studies supervised by RNDr. Jan Kofroň, Ph.D. at Charles University, Prague. By conducting phronetic social science through a case study in connection to an internship in Cairo, Egypt I entitle my thesis *The 'left-behind'. Poverty reduction, conflict prevention, peace building, 'good governance', … in informal urban settlements of the planet's most growing cities. A case study in Cairo, Egypt* The thesis' goal is to answer the following research question: *How to achieve better living conditions for the 'left-behind' in face of an increasing scale and speed of planetary urbanisation and the lack of willingness and ability of local and national governments to provide needed resources?*

1 Context

In connection to the difficulties to ascertain the borders of Political Geography (e.g., Virginie Mamadouh 2003; Painter 2003), there exists an ongoing debate about the conceptualisation of terminologies such as space, place, and territory (e.g., Cox 2001; Elden 2010, 2005). In this context, the question remains how research is capable of dealing with challenges modern (sometimes claimed post-modern) society has to face in view of a planet that, on the one hand, becomes more interconnected, and, on the other hand, whose vanishing borders create new ones, and wherein the city/state differentiation become fuzzier and fuzzier (e.g., Taylor 2000, 2007). There are standpoints which claim (a) the importance of the local for debating these challenges because *scales* themselves are not easily distinguishable anymore; (b) geopolitics must consider security issues on the micro-scale; and (c) planetary urbanisation causes physical space to become more and more operationalised for the wealth of very specific and limited parts of the world (Virgine Mamadouh, Kramsch and Velde 2004; Fregonese 2012; Brenner 2014; Brenner and Keil 2014).

In fact, we are confronted with a more and more populated and urbanised planet (UN-Habitat 2012; United Nations 2014) which is struggling hard to ensure environmental, resource, climate, health, and human security (Engelke 2013). Challenges concentrate in the manifestation of inequality in urban informal settlements, often referred to as 'slums' (Davis 2004, 2007) but the roots of the problem are not restricted to the local scale. Concurrently, the transformation of developing countries to developed countries causes the new 'emerging middle class', originally suffering too, to eventually become self-aware and striving for additional demands which create tensions in urban space (Balbo 2014); an issue which must be faced not only on the

*36195365@fsv.cuni.cz

local but also the national level, according to Balbo (2014, p. 282). In a similar manner, Fainstein (2014) emphasises that municipalities are not capable of facing these challenges alone and she tries to raise a discourse about justice in cities in general. Indications of efforts to fight against inequalities in cities are partnerships such as The Cities Alliance (2014) which try to incorporate different types of stakeholders on multiple scales and share knowledge within an international network of cities, institutions, and governments. Thus, population growth makes us face a variety of local, regional, and global challenges which require action and collaboration on multiple scales too.

The importance of the discourse mentioned above notwithstanding, from my point of view, there is an immediate need for research-based analysis and intervention which broaches the issue of unequal development and its manifestation in informal urban settlements around the world. I do not want to raise apocalyptic arguments, such as Ehrlich (1995). However, although there are voices stating that, relatively seen, the amount of people living under inhuman conditions in informal urban settlements is decreasing, the absolute numbers are increasing (UN-Habitat 2012), frightening and require emancipatory research approaches which result in concrete improvements of living conditions at their very end. 'As it has ironically been stressed, UN statisticians succeeded overnight where governments, aid agencies, finance institutions and NGOs had failed for decades, pulling out of their miserable housing conditions tens of millions of slum dwellers' (Balbo 2014, p. 278). This is why I urge the cause not to be raised on paper only but demand Political Science and Geography to give guidance in finally causing improvements and stimulations for action (cf. Schram, Flyvbjerg and Landman 2013); the idea is to refract paradigmatic prejudices concerning spheres of responsibility because they hinder sustainable development, e.g., epitomised by Virgine Mamadouh, Kramsch and Velde (2004, p. 460):

> [...] statistics generally pertaining to the national scale are inadequate to grasp the complexity of the local effects of the globalisation process. Policies of liberalisation and deregulation have led to the re-scaling of uneven development. Governments have been pre-occupied with growth and have supported growth regions, but they should not neglect economic social and political costs of uneven development and spatial planning as an instrument to deal with them.

2 Methodology

To put under scrutiny the prevailing habits connected to these challenges, I decide for an emancipatory way of philosophical grounding and research methodology. By using critical realism as ontological and epistemological groundwork, I intend to set the necessary cornerstones for pursuing so-called phronetic inquiry (see below). Although I consider the risk of combining two of such heavily theoretical structures, I see the need for setting an ontological and epistemological base for phronetic social science. This is because the approach remains silent about its underlying philosophy. Yet, as an emancipatory *Weltanschauung*, and tolerant to different types of methodological approaches, I assert critical realism as an ideal philosophical counterpart. Here, I refer to Sayer (1992, pp. 4, 5-6, 7, 14) who emphasises the triangle of method, object, and purpose; epitomises characteristics of critical realism; claims to originate from 'interdisciplinary studies of [...] urban and regional systems, in which researchers tend to come from geography, sociology, [...] political science'; and argues that knowledge is about knowing '*how to do something*'. Further, not to go beyond the

scope of this proposal concerning the philosophical foundations alone, I lastly mention critical realism's demand for normative research (Sayer 1997, p. 476). These aspects combined fall in my own ontological and epistemological standpoint, mirror the ideas of phronetic social science, and enhance the latter with a so far missing ontology and epistemology as philosophical base.

Flyvbjerg (2009) argues that social sciences are different from natural sciences *per se* and, therefore, require a new course of research. His claim is based on the discovery of three terms originally coined by Aristotle (Flyvbjerg 2009, p. 57): *episteme*, *techne*, and *phronesis*. According to Flyvbjerg, *episteme* and *techne* found their representation in today's philosophy of science whereas *phronesis* remains missing. Since their entirety is asserted as necessary for successful scientific inquiry, the lack of *phronesis* questions the current *modus operandi* of the social sciences. Thus, Flyvbjerg offers a new research approach called 'phronetic social science'. It is constituted by three pillars which are: four key questions, nine methodological guidelines, and the concept of "tension points". Here, the most important to mention are the four power questions (Flyvbjerg, Landman and Schram 2012b, p. 5): Where are we going with a specific problematic? Who gains and who loses, and by which mechanism of power? Is this development desirable? What, if anything, should we do about it? However there is much more to say about the other two pillars, not to go beyond the scope of this document, I summarise phronetic research as follows: The notion is to answer the four key questions with the help of the guidelines; to find tensions points while undertaking this inquiry; to actively stimulate a dialogue about the findings and the object of study; and to challenge dominant habits associated within uncovered power relations (Flyvbjerg 2004, 2012; Flyvbjerg, Landman and Schram 2012a). This paves the way for two ideas: eventually shifting social research from theory and discourse to praxis and action; and, thereby, set it apart from the natural sciences. Although I see the phronetic approach as an ideal method for my research, I support the argument of Soja (2013) who uncovers a crucial deficit of phronetic inquiry: its lack of spatiality. Hence, Soja (2013, p. 753) demands that 'phronesis from the start needs to be seen as simultaneously social, historical, *and spatial*'. However, so far 'one of the most significant unexplored fields of phronetic social science […] [is its application] to urban spatial causality and the generative effects of urban agglomeration' (Soja 2013, p. 755). But concentrating on 'inequality, hierarchy, and injustice', according to Soja, is 'a key step in the spatialization of phronetic social science' and important for the future development of phronetic inquiry. Since these are key components in my prospective research, next to its thematic contribution, my inquiry also puts phronetic social science on its way forward.

Two main reasons call for case study research. First, as argued by Flyvbjerg (2006), case study research is a perfect way of inquiry to simultaneously gain valuable specific and general knowledge, and, as shown in another example (Flyvbjerg, Holm and Buhl 2002), perfectly suits phronetic research. Second, I have the opportunity to work as an intern in the 'Participatory development programme in urban areas' executed by GIZ (*Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit*) in Cairo, Egypt[1] which offers me the opportunity to benefit from practical insights in the *modus operandi* of programs which try to tackle the challenges outlined above. Additionally, throughout the internship, I will gain direct experience of the situation in informal urban settlements. I consider the location and the particular development program itself ideal for investigations because of the following facts: In Greater Cairo more than

[1] For further information about the project please consult GIZ (2015) and PDP (2015).

twelve million people live in informal urban settlements (Amnesty International 2011, p. 1) which have been causing challenges in a variety of realms (e.g, El-Batran and Arandel 1998; Sioufi 1981). Because of controversies in connection to the measurement of poverty in Cairo the case is a fitting example for the ongoing debate about new conceptualisations of 'poverty' for post-2015 (Lang and Lingnau 2015; Melamed 2015; Sabry 2010), the development policy proposed for the time after the deadline of the Millennium Development Goals. In addition, Cairo is embedded into a region of recent turmoils and, thus, of geopolitical concern (e.g., Anderson 2011; Daloucara 2012; Ramadan 2013). Concerning the development program, it must be noted that it can be considered unique, and thus especially interesting to investigate, because it intervenes on multiple scales. In this context, the program was successful cooperating with three ministries of the Greater Cairo region, facilitated the foundation of a *Ministry of Urban Renewal and Informal Settlements* which became responsible not only for Cairo but entire Egypt (GIZ 2015). Concluding, the case is connected to multiple topics which are debated within the realm of my prospective thesis as well as the field of Political Geography in general.

3 Content

The research I conduct is lead by the following main research question: *How to achieve better living conditions for the 'left-behind' in face of an increasing scale and speed of planetary urbanisation and the lack of willingness and ability of local and national governments to provide needed resources?* An answer to the question I attempt to find by structuring it into four sub-questions inspired by phronetic inquiry. Following this approach my prospective thesis will include a chapter concerning the chosen methodology which is an in-depth description of the method mentioned above, thereby, argues for more political and spatial Political Geography, and explains key concepts;[2] the main part of the thesis is divided according to the four sub-questions into (a) a recapitulation of the *status quo*, (b) an analysis of the dominant power distribution, (c) a SWOT analysis, and (d) recommendations; finally, the last part summarises and concludes the paper by giving an answer to the main research question.

In general, I consider the case study an institutional and socio-spatial analysis because of the direction the 'power questions' of phronetic social science point to and the interplay of society and space within Political Geography (cf. Soja 1980; Harvey 2008). The section *status quo* is lead by the question *Where are we going with the development of informal urban settlements in Cairo?* Thereby, it sets the particular case of Cairo into the international framework of development cooperation and locates Cairo's role within the concept of planetary urbanisation. The idea is to pursue inquiry on the macro and micro scale. In the section *power distribution* I answer the question *Who gains and who loses, and by which mechanisms of power?* This part of the thesis focuses on the local dimensions of the issue, investigates the power relations of important actors, and uncovers the consequences of prevailing habits for space. In the *SWOT analysis*, investigation is lead by the question *Is this development desirable?* Here, I discover strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats of the *status quo* so-far presented in the thesis. Final *recommendations* respond to *What, if anything, should we do about it?* While especially focusing on the interplay of action on different scales, here, the idea is to give institutional and socio-spatial advice. The final part of

[2] Key concepts so far considered are: *better living conditions*, *the 'left-behind'*, *planetary urbanisation*, and *needed resources*.

the prospective thesis answers to the main research question *How to achieve better living conditions for the 'left-behind' in face of an increasing scale and speed of planetary urbanisation and the lack of willingness and ability of local and national governments to provide needed resources?* Throughout this chapter, the methodological input and the contributions to the particular case study are summarised.

To conclude, my future inquiry presents an emancipatory way of facing the demands an increasing population growth and planetary urbanisation sets by conducting a phronetic case study in Cairo, Egypt. In addition, throughout the inquiry, I tackle a major deficit of phronetic social science. Furthermore, I see the proposed inquiry capable of providing practical guidance to improve the living conditions of 'the left-behind'.

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Consent

Niklaas Baudet von Gersdorff, B.Sc. Date

RNDr. Jan Kofroň, Ph.D. Date

Contents

Preface

Writing a document of this length is impossible without substantial support from family, friends, and colleagues. The most noteworthy comments and advice were provided by

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Introduction

The human population is growing and our cities are becoming increasingly populated (United Nations Human Settlements Programme 2012). 'Urbanisation' is a phenomenon that has been known to us since the time of the Industrial Revolution. This represented a time when settlement patterns changed, when people left their homes in rural areas and the majority of the population started to live in the city. Today, this movement not only affects western states but the entire world. Because of this, recent studies suggest that contemporary society faces a similar but peculiar challenge called '*planetary* urbanisation' (Brenner 2014a, emphasis by me). Today, not only the amount of people living in the world's biggest cities rises, also certain geographical areas are operationalised for the benefit and wealth of others. As argued, this development causes inequalities between different parts of society world-wide and a permanent struggle to ensure environmental, resource, climate, health, and human security (Harvey 2006; Engelke 2013).

The sites of informal urban settlements, sometimes referred to as 'slums,' allegorise world-wide inequalities in cities in physical space and demonstrate that it is still an ongoing struggle to face contemporary forms of urbanisation (see Davis 2004). Concerning this challenge, scholars infer that local municipalities and regional actors alone are incapable of engaging with the prevalent situation; rather, they stress the need of political decisions taken on multiple administrative levels, that is, from local to global (see Balbo 2013; Fainstein 2014). Thus, numerous developing countries benefit from donor funding to improve the living conditions of the affected population cooperatively. The increasing efforts of donors could suggest that they address the fact that such environments have been left-behind. But observers are of the opinion that a decreasing amount of resources reach those impoverished because frameworks for aid are ineffective (Kharas 2007).

An example of this dilemma is the *Participatory Development Programme* operated by the German association *Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit* ('Association for

International Co-operation') in Cairo, Egypt. Since its establishment in 1998, the project has been engaging with multiple administrative levels of the metropolitan area. At the moment, the European Union, in parallel to the German state and the *Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation*, provides most of the financial contribution. The overall aim of the donor support is to improve the living conditions of those left-behind (see Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit Egypt 2015). Thus, we witness a complex system of actors, each originating from and addressing different administrative levels, all fighting for the wealth of others in different spaces. However, research about participatory development co-operation in general, and this programme in particular, are highly critical of these efforts, as outcomes remain absent (see Dill 2009; Mohan and Stokke 2000; Piffero 2009).

In light of this dilemma I asked myself: how can living conditions of 'the left-behind' be improved in the face of both an increasing scale and speed of planetary urbanisation and the lack of willingness and/or ability of local, national, international, governmental, and non-governmental organisations to provide needed and essential resources? I read this question not with substantive but meta-theoretical concerns in mind. How can academia translate concerns about prevalent geographico-political phenomena into substantive actions? How can academia legitimate a normative momentum in their research outcomes? Moreover, how can academia ascertain whether the proposed measures will actually improve and not impair the situation addressed?

Although social scientists, from Max Weber to Michel Foucault, all intend to produce socially relevant work (see for example Gerring 2015), disputes prevail regarding how to do so and which ontology to use while researching. Voices reflect a wide range from radical neopositivist to postmodernist standpoints. This dilemma we also encounter in political geography, where scientific endeavours span from contributions of the neorealist camp to the camp of critical geopoliticians respectively. The situation is even worsened by the complexity and elusiveness of the geographico-political phenomena that researchers of the field engage in.

The purpose of the thesis is to scrutinise this uncertainty and propose a solution. By combining young and innovative approaches of the philosophy of social science with mature but overlooked contributions of the field, the research aims to illuminate a novel meta-theoretical territory that overcomes the aforementioned doubts. This will help political geographers to provide solutions not only for the case in Cairo but the meta-theoretical dilemma overall.

The thesis will take us on a journey from the most abstract to the most concrete. In the first chapter we discuss the philosophy of social science in general to relate it to debates in political geography and international relations. In this context we elaborate on key aspects that the proposed approach must engage with. In the second chapter, we reconsider the original core of critical realism. Its philosophical ontology (transcendental realism) will help us to develop a sound metaphysics for everything geographico-political. In the third chapter, we encounter phronetic social science as epistemological and methodological add-on to the social sciences to become socially valuable.

In the fourth chapter, we get acquainted with the French tradition around *géopolitiques* and develop the proposed research programme. Considering *géopolitiques*, we will arrive at an understanding of 'geopolitics' that is more encompassing than the Anglophone one. This will assist in synthesising critical realism and phronetics in a research programme that I call 'transcendental phronetic political geography.' It can address phenomena that relate to the highly debated concepts of power, space, scale, and justice that are of concern in socio-spatial inequalities as described above. It is an umbrella term for critical and emancipatory research in political geography. In the same chapter we discuss the compatibility of the chosen ideas, demarcate the proposed programme from other approaches, and argue for its applicability.

The fifth and last chapter applies transcendental phronetic political geography to the *Participatory Development Programme* in Cairo incipiently . This chapter, in virtue of critical realism, incorporates an explanatory critique and, with phronesis in mind, discloses the power relations that maintain the current situation by applying an 'analyse systemique,' as French geopoliticians say. By doing so, I further clarify how the developed approach can translate into practice. At the end of the thesis the entire work is discussed. It follows a debate about the flaws of the proposed research programme and a discussion of its future cornerstones.

Chapter 1

State of affairs in the philosophy of social science

The following chapter explains why the pursuit of social inquiry is a difficult endeavour. The argument goes that these difficulties make it impossible for social scientists to pursue research like natural scientists. Although this fact is appreciated in contemporary philosophy, there remain disagreements about these difficulties in applied social sciences. We will discuss the different standpoints within these inconclusive debates.

The main aim of this chapter is to contextualise the meta-theoretical concerns of the disciplines in question: political geography, geopolitics, and international relations. This will enable us to address them with the help of critical realism in the next chapter.

1.1 A very short introduction to philosophy

In principle, the questions that are raised within the field of philosophy can be structured into three main branches: axiology, which can itself be divided into ethics and aesthetics; metaphysics which includes ontology; and epistemology (Archie 2007).

Throughout the thesis we will mainly deal with metaphysical, epistemological, and ethical questions. Metaphysical questions are: What is there and how is it like? What exists and how is it structured? More precisely, these are questions departing from ontology. The distinction between metaphysics and ontology originates from the broadening of metaphysics in the seventeenth century. By pursuing ontology, we address the science of *being* and nothing else (van Inwagen and Sullivan 2015). On the contrary, epistemology is, literally, the study of knowledge and 'the creation and dissemination of knowledge in particular areas of inquiry' (Steup 2014; Truncellito 2015). A scholar who is concerned about epistemology asks: What do we know about

the world and how can we know more about it? What is the best attempt to increase our knowledge about the world? And what does it mean 'to know more' about something?

In comparison, the field of ethics tries to answer the questions: What is right and what is wrong in terms of human behaviour? What is 'human,' that is, how should we react and behave? The arguments following in this work mainly concern normative and applied ethics. Normative ethics implies the idea to finally reach a level of 'moral standards that regulate right and wrong conduct,' while applied ethics engages with specific practical issues of human life (Fieser 2015). Although ethical questions have been asked for millennia, there is no ultimate answer to them (which we will deal with later).

The tradition that poses ontological, epistemological, and ethical questions toward different disciplines in science is called 'philosophy of science.' There, scholars ask what makes an inquiry scientific, how such inquiry can be achieved best, and what the purpose of science is. While it is difficult to clearly demarcate these traditions, Monteiro and Ruby (2009) outline that three main foundational standpoints have been developing over the course of history: instrumentalism, social constructivism, and scientific realism. Likewise, Bhaskar (1998a, 19-23) differentiates between classical empiricism, transcendental idealism, and his philosophy: transcendental realism.

Each of these streams relates ontology to epistemology differently. Instrumentalism and social constructivism give more weight to epistemology. Their ontology is 'flat' (Benton and Craib 2011) because both base their arguments on empirical realism, as Bhaskar (1998a, 21) notes. As we will see, the situation in transcendental realism is completely different because its focus lies on ontology. The differences of the three streams make the philosophy of science a very contested environment.

1.2 The difficulties of social inquiry

The philosophy of science is more relevant for social scientists than for natural scientists. It helps us to investigate whether our inquiries are successful or not, thus, whether we should decrease, maintain, or increase our efforts in pursuing them. Here, the stance of the natural sciences is superior than the one of the social sciences because the former demonstrates its success with ease whereas the latter struggles to do so. This is for two reasons: Firstly, natural scientists have been improving our power to control the world, that is, to use the natural world for our benefits through technological innovation; and

secondly, the theories we develop in the natural sciences 'tend to increase in depth, range and predictive power' (Gorton 2015). On the contrary, comparable achievements generally lack in the social sciences. Because of this, scholars scrutinise the efforts we put into social inquiry. Such scrutinising is done in a discipline that is called philosophy of *social* science (see for example Benton and Craib 2011; Risjord 2014; Rosenberg 2016).

In his introduction Risjord (2014, 7) claims that discussions within the philosophy of social science mainly concern naturalism, reductionism, and normativity. Our standpoint in regard to these notions affects what we think the social sciences are about, expect from it, and thus, how we pursue social research. Although the debates seem highly theoretical and detached from practical relevance, what is at stake are the overall reliability and acceptance of social inquiries in academia. Some go even as far as questioning 'whether or how the study of human social behaviour is scientific' at all (Fay 2010, 1046).

Next to this fundamental doubt, our standpoint in disputes about naturalism, reductionism, and normativity also affects our attitude toward the role of prediction and values in social research. Depending on the standpoint we take, we give them a more or less important stance in our research projects. As the next sections show, in the philosophy of social science prediction and values are continuously made topic – and are especially relevant for the disciplines the thesis focuses on: political geography and international relations.

1.2.1 Naturalism: equalising natural and social sciences

According to naturalism, there shall be made no difference between the natural and social sciences and social scientists shall emulate natural scientists to replicate the success of the discipline. In this context, we can distinguish between ontological naturalism and epistemological naturalism (Risjord 2014, 8-9). *Ontological* naturalism demands that we investigate the same entities in the social sciences as we do in the natural sciences. According to this standpoint, there is no difference between investigating humans and their behaviour, or for example planets and their movements. *Epistemological* naturalism holds that the modus operandi of research in social sciences must be the same as the one we pursue in natural sciences, that is, the methods we use in the latter we must also use in the former. Scholars of both positions argue that the social sciences must reflect the natural sciences, otherwise human sciences could not be successful.

Extreme forms of naturalism are empiricism and positivism. They presuppose that only 'nature is the order of things accessible to us through observation and the methods

of the empirical sciences' (Jacobs 2015). According to empiricism, the answer to the question 'what is there and what is it like?' goes 'there is everything that can be observed and it is like we observe it' which makes it a very 'flat ontology' (Benton and Craib 2011).

These assumptions were developed by positivists to prove that all human knowledge can be inferred from sensory information (Roth 2010). In this context the leading figure is Auguste Comte who was the first to coin the term positivism (Gorton 2015; cf. Murzi 2010). It can be seen as the starting point of the epistemological dimension of empiricism. Positivists argue that 'meaningful statements about the world are limited to those that can be tested through direct observing' (Gorton 2015). Positivism is a diverse tradition, but what all forms of it have in common is regularity, determinism, and system closure (Steinmetz 2005, 31-35).

Likewise, naturalists disagree about what makes an adequate methodology within science but some key characteristics of naturalism can be outlined. According to Gorton (2015) we can claim that naturalism mainly supports three notions (cf. Jacobs 2015; Benton and Craib 2011, 23): First, science must be empirical; second, its goal is to produce causal explanations; and third, scientists are prohibited to make value judgements. These aspects make science distinguishable from non-science in the sense that they establish standards of scientific inquiry. One of the most prominent examples of authors who tried to establish such standards is Karl Popper. By introducing his concept of empirical falsifiability, he claimed that, although we can never make sure that our theories are true, we can at least claim their truth until we are able to falsify them through theory testing.

The idea to produce causal explanations resembles the attempt to produce law-like regularities, that is, theories that are as simple and as general as possible while explaining the broadest scope of different types of events. The third notion, the neglect of values, implies the idea that '[s]cience can help us better understand how to manipulate the social world to help us achieve our goals, but it cannot tell us what those goals ought to be' (Gorton 2015) which is inherently connected to David Hume's claim that 'proper' science prohibits scholars to include an 'ought.'

By relying on empiricism and positivism, naturalists emphasise that only sciences can produce knowledge (Benton and Craib 2011, 23). Scientific knowledge is considered genuine and the highest aim possible to reach through human mental endeavour. In accordance with naturalism, empiricism and positivism, they stress that the social

sciences are obligated to emulate the natural sciences. By doing so, the claim is that we will finally come to a stage when our achievements through natural inquiries enable us to control and shape the social world. This notion, often referred to as 'social engineering,' is comparable to the natural sciences' goal to control the natural world through technology. In hope for similar technological advancements, according to naturalists, success in the social sciences is possible as long as we stick to the path chosen by naturalists.

But is naturalism the way to go in the social sciences? And does such an attempt really guarantee success? No, because there is great evidence to refrain from emulating the ontology and epistemology of the natural sciences.

Concerning ontology, we can argue that the objects under study in the social world are inherently different from those in the natural world. On the contrary to natural objects and the naturalists' claim, humans are conscious and aware of their consciousness (28). Because of this, they act with reason; their actions get *meaning*. On the contrary to humans, atoms and planets move because they are *caused* to do so by other phenomena (Fay 2010, 1046; Gorton 2015).[1] Trying to circumvent the unpredictability of humans, social scientists have developed the idea of a 'rational actor' who acts according to several principles. However, humans tend not to behave rationally per se (Fay 2010, 1049; Gorton 2015). Hence, in the social and natural world, we seem to deal with different objects of study. Since people are self-aware and fallible, the flat ontology of empiricism is insufficient.

Concerning epistemology, a naturalist ontology makes a lot of scientific advancements unexplainable because it accepts only what we can perceive empirically. Since research requires creativity and the capability to imagine the unobservable, we must take the unobservable seriously. However, empiricism is incapable of explaining our ability to conceptualise models that we have been initially unaware of because it lacks the unobservable. Again, the narrowness of the naturalist ontology hampers our attempts to better understand the world – social and natural (Benton and Craib 2011, 31-34). We will discuss this objection in more detail in the next chapter too.

Further objections include the claim that it is impossible to infer any law-like regularities in the social sciences. The argument is that the complexity of the social

1. Causation is a term full of meaning in the philosophy of science. The positivists camp equalises causation with the regularity of events. According to them, if we witness an event under particular conditions several times, we can ascertain that we discovered a causal law. In the next chapter we will question this standpoint in more depth.

world makes the pursuit of controlled experiments difficult. Maybe because of the youth of the social sciences, social laws are usually 'imprecise, exception ridden and time-bound or place-bound rather than precise and universal' (Gorton 2015). Thus, an idealisation of the conditions, as it is done in the hypothetico-deductive model of naturalists (Benton and Craib 2011), is hard, and generating social theories that propagate laws remains difficult (Fay 2010, 1048).

These are only some of the many objections to naturalism. However, they already show that we cannot simply impose the ideas of the natural sciences on the social sciences. Although we can learn a lot from the philosophy of science, it seems necessary to develop a unique philosophy of *social* science that is capable of addressing the special needs of social studies.

1.2.2 Reductionism: the whole is the accumulation of its parts

As it is the case with naturalism, we can distinguish between ontological and epistemological reductionism (Risjord 2014, 10), and additionally demarcate theoretical reductionism (Ney 2015). In all cases, 'to reduce' means that one idea, concept, or entity can be replaced or compensated by another because the latter enables us to explain more with less effort. (In light of this, we see that reductionism shares some notions with naturalism. Nevertheless, reductionism do not need to be an inherent part of naturalism.) In this section, we will first take a look on the different forms of reductionism, and subsequently depict objections against it.

Ontological reductionists claim that every system or structure can be reduced to its smallest parts. This implies that everything in the entire universe can be reduced to a finite amount of very small particles. Epistemological reductionists claim that once we are able to understand the smallest particles we can also understand the system they constitute. They argue that there is no need to study the bigger structure; rather, we are doing our best to understand the world by describing the smallest parts as best as we can. In a similar manner, theoretical reductionists infer that one theory can be replaced by another more general and simpler theory. In accordance to this, 'more fundamental' disciplines will eventually supersede 'less fundamental' disciplines. Thus, sociology will be superseded by psychology; psychology by biology; biology by chemistry; and finally, chemistry will be reduced to physics. Concluding, some scholars claim that every concern of any scientific discipline can be explained through physics at some point (Benton and Craib 2011, 127).

However, conceptualisations such as 'multiple realisability,' 'emergence,' and 'supervenience' question the feasibility of reductionism. 'Multiple realisation' means that for a specific, for example social or non-physical phenomenon, there exist a variety of physical conditions that would satisfy the non-physical phenomenon and vice versa. To consider the example given by Ney (2015) in reference to Putnam and Fodor, 'is in pain' can be constituted through many physical phenomena but the very same physical phenomena can also implicate a non-physical phenomenon that is different from 'is in pain.' Thus, we 'would not be able to find true identity statements linking special science predicates with predicates from physical science' (Ney 2015). According to Jaworski (2015), multiple realisability is based on three premises: First, mental types are multiply realisable; second, if mental types are multiple realisable, then they are not identical to physical types; third, if mental types are not identical to physical types, then psychological discourse (vernacular or scientific) is not reducible to physical theory.

When we speak of emergence, we talk about the idea that a novel phenomenon may materialise (physically or meta-physically) from complex systems (social structures) that we, in respect to their internal structure, would not have thought of in the stage of pre-materialisation (Vintiadis 2015). In this context, scholars distinguish between strong and weak or ontological and epistemological emergence (Vintiadis 2015; cf. O'Connor and Wong 2015). While strong emergence infers that the novelty of the new phenomena causes irreducibility, and, further, that new phenomena may influence the phenomenon it emerged from; weak emergence only puts emphasis on the unpredictability of the 'materialisation' of the novel phenomenon in the stage of pre-materialisation. Hence, both types of emergence oppose to ontological and epistemological reductionism respectively. This makes emergence is an unexplainable phenomenon by proponents of ontological and epistemological reductionism.

In the case of supervenience, the idea is to describe a relationship between two properties that is complementary to the concept of determination. It is defined as follows (Rickles 2015):

> For two sets of properties, A (the *super*venient set) and B (the *sub*venient set or supervenience *base*), A supervenes on B just in case there can be no difference in A without a difference in B.

Without going too much into detail of the logical implications and the debates around it, supervenience shares some similarities with multiple realisability. For example, if a non-physical phenomenon supervenes on a physical phenomenon and the

latter changes, because of its supervenient character, the former does not need to change necessarily. However, if the non-physical phenomenon (the supervenient set) changes, the physical phenomenon (the subvenient set) must change necessarily. In other words, the relationship between A and B is rather fuzzy than explicit. Thus, supervenience describes a 'dependency weaker than identity and reduction' (Rickles 2015) In some instances, a change of the subvenient property is detached from changes of the supervenient property. Whether supervenience makes reductionism impossible or not is debatable (Rickles 2015; cf. McLaughlin 1997). Anyway, it becomes clear that sustaining reductionism is complicated.

Concluding, reductionism would, if it was possible, simplify our ontological and epistemological understanding of the world. But philosophers of the social sciences have been revealing that there are a variety of difficulties. The arguments of proponents of multiple realisability, emergence, and supervenience demonstrate that ontological, epistemological, and theoretical reductionism has its limits. We will further discuss these notions in the next chapter when we deal with so-called 'stratification.'

1.2.3 Normativity: what we ought to do

As stated above, proponents of positivism and empiricism remain indifferent about values and concentrate on facts solely. This is not only because abstract concepts such as ideas or beliefs are considered unimportant for scientific inquiry (as long as they are not causal factors) and, therefore, can be excluded from investigation; further, as epitomised by Gorton (2015) in connection to naturalism, the goal of scientific endeavour is to produce causal explanations while avoiding value judgements (remember Hume's claim not to deduce an 'ought' from an 'is'). However, certain aspects in the social sciences are difficult to think of without values. '[C]oncepts [such as "democracy" and "peace"] cannot be defined in ways that are completely independent of political values' (Risjord 2014, 7). Further, as argued by Risjord, conceptualising both 'fact' and 'value' remains complicated and makes our attempt to adequately deal with these notions in the social sciences even more difficult.

In this context, Marx's remark in his *Thesis on Feuerbach* is often mentioned as an example for the establishment of an emancipatory social science (for example in Gorton 2015; Fay 2010; Joll 2015). Such a pursuit is, according to him, capable not only of interpreting but changing the world which is even one step further than interpretivism goes. Such an attitude toward the purpose of social science diminishes both the positivst understanding of scientific inquiry and our standpoint as neutral and/or objective

observers of the world (Fay 2010, 1050). According to proponents of these critical ideas, we should 'aim at enhancing [the] understanding of our world rather than merely enhancing our powers of prediction and technical control' (Gorton 2015). All of this makes social inquiry a deeply political enterprise.

The idea to consider social inquiry a political enterprise can be put even further. In the context of 'social engineering,' Michel Foucault stated that what is considered truth is declared by power relations within society (Gorton 2015; Benton and Craib 2011, 49). Likewise, value neutrality is seen as an ideology which helps social science 'to legitimate and reinforce oppressive values, beliefs, and practices and thereby mask domination' (Gorton 2015). For the sake of liberation and emancipation the oppression shall be breached. With his line of argument, Foucault founded a novel stream of thought that has many proponents today and is known as 'postmodernism,' sometimes 'poststructuralism.' Scholars of these types of approaches maintain objections to more traditional attempts of social inquiry. Their good intentions notwithstanding, extreme forms of postmodernism or poststructuralism can be understood as 'philosophical ideologies' (Benton and Craib 2011, 175) themselves and are highly criticised because they make scientific inquiry (nearly) impossible, according to its critics.

I do not intend to start a debate about the legitimacy of postmodern or poststructuralist approaches but to raise the concern that neglecting values and prohibiting normative notions in scientific works can be problematic. Proponents of the normative account within the social sciences argue that 'cultural norms and values cannot be disentangled from scientific knowledge-claims' (44). In addition, Hume's claim that one may not derive an 'ought' from an 'is,' by and of itself, is a normative statement, thus self-contradictory. In other words, 'the view of science as the pursuit of objective knowledge about the world itself implies value commitments' (44) and, as written elsewhere, normative orientations come with empirical ones (Mihic, Engelmann and Wingrove 2005, 476). Hence, instead of ignoring anything related to values and ensuring value neutrality, we should understand 'facticity and normativitiy as mutually supporting grounds' (477).

So, on the one hand, we have the idea of increasing our knowledge of the world in terms of understanding the underlying causalities, and on the other hand, there is the attempt to focus on the normative account of social science and its stance as a political enterprise. Thus, although both facticity *and* normativity are considered important, it seems difficult to combine both. While the naturalist side criticises value

judgements, proponents of normativity object to the limitations of naturalism and positivist approaches to social inquiry.

To conclude this section, instead of one clear line describing where to go in the philosophy of social science, we saw diverse streams in both ontology and epistemology. Each approach pursues studies in the social sciences differently which makes it a difficult attempt to decide for the 'right' one. Next to this, it is also the idiosyncrasy of the object under study which precipitates the complexity of social inquiries and increases the difficulty.

To circumvent these concerns, scholars have been trying to rely on naturalist views which they hoped enable them to replicate the success of the natural sciences. In this context, we further considered streams that are juxtaposed to these traditional attempts, such as the critical school or postmodernism. Here, scholars argue that naturalist approaches create knowledge regimes which harms liberal society. We addressed the concern that postmodern approaches are often doomed entirely because they are self-contradictory and make scientific inquiry (nearly) impossible. Yet, especially in regard to normativity and the emancipatory character of the social sciences, they provide noteworthy contributions and objections to the limitations of flat ontologies and epistemologies such as empiricism and positivism. Although these concerns are plausible, there remain many authors who argue for naturalism and the primacy of such and similar approaches in the social sciences.

Overall, this section juxtaposes the notion of propagating naturalist, empiricist, positivist notions versus relative approaches such as interpretivism , the critical school, postmodernism. In this context, we shortly discussed that attention is directed toward law-finding, causation, and prediction on the one hand, and understanding, interpreting, and meaning on the other hand. Further we considered different types of reductionism, and in this context the idea that physical sciences will eventually supersede non-physical sciences. However, as shown, simplifying scientific endeavour is difficult because of notions such as emergence, multiple realisability, and supervenience. Finally, this lead us to critical approaches which propagate inquiries that focus on the emancipatory character of social inquiry. Rather than incorporating existing ideas in the philosophy of social science, such attempts, in their extreme forms, condemn the scientific endeavour at all because it is understood as a platform for the creation of knowledge regimes. Hence, from a philosophical standpoint, we are trapped within several different ontological

and epistemological understandings that try to convince us what the social sciences are about; what makes social inquiry scientific; how such inquiry can be achieved best; and what the purpose of the social sciences is.

1.3 Responses by geographico-political disciplines

Obviously, the aforementioned difficulties find echoes in disciplines that are more applied than philosophy. When investigating the evolution of the geographico-political discourse in academia from today's standpoint, we see that the roots of both political geography and geopolitics are tied together closely. When Friedrich Ratzel, who was the first to coin the term 'Politische Geografie,' and Rudolf Kjellen, who was the first to coin the term 'Geopolitik,' introduced their thinking close to the turning point of the ninetieth to the twentieth century (Criekemans 2009), they were probably unaware of the fact that they raised two siblings that would gain popularity as both a 'good' and a 'bad' example to think geography politically (Agnew 2002, 80-2).

In fact, geographers have been thinking politically throughout history. In the pre-modern age, we have investigated maps to realise that nature *compels* states because natural borders were too difficult to circumvent. In the modern age, we have concluded that nature *advises* states, because we disclosed nature's richness and natural borders vanished (Kristof 1960, 10). So, our ideas were eventually misunderstood, and misused to serve as rationale for an atrocious strategy of expansion by German politicians in the first half of the last century. In the aftermath, 'Geopolitics,' originally understood as the conjunction of geographical and political thought, got condemned as an academic field, and its revival took decades while the field of political geography has been busy dissociating itself from its sibling (Hepple 1986; cf. Kristof 1960; Alexander 1961). Today, in line with the spatial turn of the last decades (see Lossau and Lippuner 2004; Schlögel 2011; Warf and Arias 2009), contributions concerning everything that is geographico-political are flourishing.

These contributions stem from the complexity of the object under study. As the unappreciated[2] introduction to the philosophy of geography by Varzi (2001) reveals, the discipline must investigate structures that are rich in ontology and difficult to distinguish. Geographers deal with objects whose boundaries are unclear, and are

2. Consulting the Web of Science reveals that Varzi (2001) has been cited seven times only as of May 2016.

difficult to conceptualise (Smith 2001). Take for example mountains (where does a mountain begin or end?), riverbanks that change permanently, or the difficulty to define whether one deals with a forest or an agglomeration of trees. Conceptual vagueness is very well known to the geographer. In addition, geographers address both physical and social phenomena. For example, national borders are social interventions, but only visible physically where humans manifested them in physical space. Yet, in the social space they are permanently visible in culture, identity, language et cetera. Thus, the physical and the social space are interconnected, as most prominently discussed by Lefebvre ([1991] 2014), and in political geography applied in inquiries of the French school that we will encounter later.

The divide of the discipline into physical and human geography underlines the ontological complexity. On the one hand, it epitomises the variety of different attempts to deal with geography's rich ontology that spans from natural to social phenomena. On the other hand, every divide inherently separates scholars of one type from those of another type, and whether these co-operate is questionable (Viles 2005).

The elusiveness of geographico-political phenomena is also evident in different approaches that are pursued in sub-disciplines of geography. The relation between political geography and geopolitics is intangible (Lossau 2002) while both live at the very edge of human geography (Taylor 2000a). In an article concerning the politics of political geography, Mamadouh (2003) argues that it lacks a central core. The discipline suffers from a complex structure of sub-disciplines while scholars struggle to demarcate the field from others (see also Painter 2003). Concurrently, political geography has its centre in the Anglophone world which makes scholars tend to ignore innovative approaches that are written in other languages than English (see also Sidaway 2008). Similar elusiveness we also encounter in geopolitics (Bassin et al. 2004) where academics try to cope with 'messy' geopolitical contexts (Flint 2006, 189). Scholars who try to understand space share standpoints that range from those of critical geopolitics to those of the neorealist school of international relations (Kofroň 2012). Mamadouh (2003, 672) concludes (see also Agnew 2003):

> Political geography needs not closure, in terms of determining which topics and themes should be addressed and in which places, but clarification about specific tools, both concepts and methodologies.

Yet, the situation is rather different. In the last section we saw that the difficulty of social inquiry is connected to three key concepts: naturalism, reductionism, and norm-

ativity. These are also visible in human geography where scholars differentiate between positivist, humanistic, and structuralist approaches mainly (Johnston 1986). Notions of naturalism and reductionism are noticeable in the positivist approach of human geography. Humanistic approaches challenge this standpoint and try to emancipate the object they study by increasing their understanding of the individual. Structuralism reverses reductionism. We see, the key concepts of the philosophy of social science reoccur in human geography. And, as in the philosophical debates, scholars have been questioning the scientific character of approaches in human geography (Hickey and Lawson 2005).

Debates around naturalism, reductionism, and normativity are also present in more specialised sub-disciplines such as political geography. Although scholars struggle to disentangle the discipline, it can be divided into three streams: the spatial analytic perspective, the political-economic perspective, and the postmodern approach (Agnew, Mitchell and Toal 2003; 4; Mamadouh 2004, 432) – each of them being accompanied by the ever-arising debate whether the nation-state is the most important political actor or not (see Herb 2008). How do the streams reflect the debates of the philosophy of social science? The spatial analytic perspective is a naturalist approach, the political-economic perspective questions reductionism by addressing different contexts of space and time, and postmodern approaches are famous for including normative arguments. Last but not least, scholars who argue that the state is the most important actor in political geography are reductionist since they reduce other complexities to the nation-state.

Another attempt to structure the discipline is the one by Mamadouh (1998). She categorised the different meanings of the term ‘geopolitics’ in view of two dimensions: firstly, to which extent approaches are practical and applied versus academic and reflective; secondly, to which extent state-centrism is supported or neglected. The categorisation yields four major approaches recognised as ‘geopolitics:’ neo-classical geopolitics, subversive geopolitics, non-geopolitics, and post-structuralistic geopolitics (cf. the division into ‘geopolitics’ and ‘anti-geopolitics’ by Drulák 2006). In other words, she categorised the different meanings according to their ontological stance (state or not state), and according to their epistemological stance (practical or theoretical). Again, the connection to philosophy is inherent.

Concluding, the aforementioned philosophical debates are also pursued in political geography. And as demanded by Mamadouh (2003, in the quotation above), scholars of political geography try to clarify their key concepts continuously. In light of the

ontological richness and the diversity of approaches within the discipline, it stands to reason that the range of concepts is excessive, and that they are conceptualised in divergent ways. The collection of Gallaher et al. (2009) outlines a total of *twenty-eight* key concepts. Within the scope of the thesis we will mainly deal with three of them: the nation-state, power, and scale. At this stage it is important to understand that the difficulties of the social science are omnipresent in political geography, and geographers struggle to find ontological and epistemological answers for the complexity of the object they study.

Since political geography and international relations are interconnected (Criekemans 2009; Mamadouh and Dijkink 2006, 352-4), it is no wonder that similar philosophical debates have been perpetuating in the latter too. But as a sub-discipline of political science, international relations has been dominated by positivism (Mihic, Engelmann and Wingrove 2005, 493; see also Shapiro 2002). Throughout last century, the supremacy of positivism has been challenged by other approaches, which has made the discipline infamous for its meta-theoretical debates. On the one hand, Walt (1998) and Lake (2013) appreciated the so-called 'great debates of international relations' because they resulted in a methodological tool set, and let the practitioner decide which tool is the best to use for a particular situation.

On the other hand, instead of applying the tools, scholars believed they could strengthen their approaches and argue for their superiority with the help of philosophical foundations. A lot of (yet) unsettled discussions resulted. Because of this, Monteiro and Ruby (2009) speak of a 'false promise of philosophical foundations.' To them the crux is that philosophical foundations are *a priori* knowledge, and 'cannot be proven true or false' (32). So, if scholars use them to claim the scientific superiority of their approaches, we will witness endless and unsolvable debates.

But philosophical foundations are not destined to cause these dilemmas. As long as they are not used to argue for the pre-eminence of a particular approach, they can strengthen and enhance the standpoints we develop. This is mainly because the philosophy of science and the social sciences go hand in hand. The former can help the latter to maintain their stance as 'sciences,' as we discussed in the previous sections. (In fact, this thesis is a very attempt to do so for both phronetic social science and the French school of *géopolitiques*.)

In light of this Monteiro and Ruby (2009) argue for a standpoint that is 'post-

foundational,' or eclectic as Lake (2013) puts it. This means to engage with philosophical foundations productively and to remain sceptic about discovering a single foundation for the discipline in question. As we witnessed in international relations, philosophical foundations are not intended to serve as leverage; rather they shall serve as guides to strengthen and enhance established approaches. And, of course, they can also light the path toward new ideas.

To conclude, the field of international relations epitomises that the difficulties of social inquiry can have negative side effects for the discourse about a particular discipline itself. What we must learn is that research in the social sciences is not only difficult in practice. In addition, the complexity of social inquiry can motivate scholars to spend their time and effort on work that lacks any *relevant* output but spurs inconclusive discussions about the field itself. Thus, research in the social field is not only difficult in theory but meta-theory. 'Relevance' is a keyword in this context. How must social inquiry look like to be relevant? And what is it that makes social research relevant? Since it is not our intention to flood political geography with inconclusive discussions, we will discuss requirements for practising relevant social science in the next section.

1.4 What a contemporary approach must address

Let us epitomise the arguments of the previous sections. Social inquiry is a complex endeavour whose scientific character is challenged. We saw that, depending on the ontological and epistemological standpoint, scholars pursue research differently. In general, scholars contemplate about three conceptions: naturalism, reductionism, and normativity. Naturalism and reductionism are difficult to hold because the object under study is special in the social sciences. Moreover, it is impossible to pursue any research value-free; thus, normativity becomes a side effect.

The elusiveness of the geographico-political environment is an obstacle to demarcate disciplinary boundaries. Scholars were left without choice but to find their specific access to geographical-political questions. Thus, scholars think of and discuss their field diversely. While we witnessed the ingenuity of scholars who could enhance their epistemological tool sets through philosophy, we discussed the negative effects that philosophical foundations can have on discourse. We learned that, to avoid the negative effects, we must pursue foundational prudence, be eclectic in the choice of the

approach, and develop a standpoint that is post-foundational. Moreover, we may not loose ourselves in meta-theoretical wars and keep track of the substantive world.

These aspects raise several dilemmas for geographico-political disciplines of which I consider the following the most important: To engage in the elusiveness of the field, we require a diversified tool set but there is great danger to drift toward 'anything goes approaches.' This tension forces us to work at two fronts: First, we must develop an ontological perception that incorporates all kinds of geographico-political entities. Second, we must prepare epistemological and methodological guidelines that enable us to better understand these entities, and ensure both methodical rigour and socially relevant results.

To conclude, we saw that questions of the philosophy of science become visible in political geography by both metaphysical and epistemological uncertainty. Disciplines that engage in geographico-political phenomena are broad (to say the least) which is reflected in the numerous sub-disciplines that incite a variety of different ontological and epistemological standpoints. In turn, these standpoints are echoed in a diversified tool set for engaging with geographico-political phenomena. From neorealists to critical geopoliticians, scholars are keen to provide their answers in regard to what to investigate in political geography and how to investigate it. Here, the greatest dilemma is to find balance between a suitable ontological standpoint that can incorporate the elusiveness of the object under study, and epistemological and methodological guidelines that prevent 'anything goes approaches' but provide an adequate way to deal with the entities in question and produce relevant outcomes.

Hence, in the thesis we will propose an alternative solution to the prevalent traditions. In the following chapter, we will start by developing an ontological foundation that provides insightful answers to the issues mentioned above.

Chapter 2

Reconsidering the core of critical realism

Let us take a closer look on how to solve the difficulties of social inquiry with the help of critical realism. What is today known as 'critical realism' is the conjunction of 'transcendental realism' and 'critical naturalism.' Both were introduced by Bhaskar ([1979] 1998, 2008) who acknowledged the umbrella term 'critical realism' ex post. In this chapter we ignore Bhaskar's more recent contributions because these are infamously subsumed under a 'spiritual turn' that lacks philosophical rigour (Benton and Craib 2011, 203). Moreover, Mäki and Oinas (2004) argues that geographers must reconsider the core tenets of the philosophy.

The chapter is divided into four sections. In the first section, we discuss the two most important aspects of the philosophy: abandoning an anthropocentric worldview and the pursuit of transcendental arguments. In the sections two and three, we reconsider transcendental realism and critical naturalism respectively. The fourth section concludes the chapter by outlining how critical realism is misunderstood in both international relations and political geography.

2.1 The peculiarity of critical realism

While reading Bhaskar's texts, the reader notices two reoccurring aspects. First, the idea that the world can exist without science while science cannot exist without the world; second, the pursuit of so-called 'transcendental arguments.' Let us first take a look on the first aspect, and subsequently investigate the second one.

As Bhaskar (1998a, 35) criticises, the philosophy of science has tended to be too anthropocentric. When we talked about naturalism, reductionism, and normativity, sciences themselves have never been questioned, and philosophers and scientists have

implicitly insisted on the existence of science. Not only have we taken for granted the existence of science, we have also taken for granted the existence of humans and their thinking.

But we can imagine a world without us and without our scientific endeavours (Bhaskar 1998a, 35-6). The Earth, numerous other planets and the universe as a whole will continue to exist if the entire human species is extinct. Likewise, the world will continue to exist if there is no longer any scientific inquiry. They will not only cease if humans are extinct, but a world where humans live but where there is no science is imaginable (for example as was the case during the Stone Age). Hence, the world is possible without humans; and the world is possible without science.

Yet, science is impossible without the world. What would science be about? Where would science happen? Science investigates the world. If there is no world, there is no science; it cannot do its job, its purpose is vanished, and it simply could not exist at all. Because of this, the world must be a certain way and science becomes a *spontaneous* aspect of it. We cannot take the existence of science for granted. Bhaskar (1998a, 22) writes:

> It is not necessary that science occurs. But given that it does, it is necessary that the world is a certain way.

Now, let us turn to the second fundamental notion of Bhaskar's elaborations: transcendental arguments. They are spurred by questions that have the form 'what must be true in order for x to be possible?' (Collier 1994, 20)

Although, the arguments root in the philosophy of Immanuel Kant, according to Collier (1994, 21-5), Bhaskar and Kant disagree in three aspects. First and foremost, while Kant ponders knowledge in general, Bhaskar studies *science* which he considers a special form of knowledge. Second, Kant is concerned about the mind, and demonstrates how the mind inflicts our knowledge on the world. On the contrary, the novel aspect of the philosophy of Bhaskar is that it not only tells us something about the mind, it further explains conditions of the world, separately from our mind.

Finally and third, Kant considers his philosophy to disclose some underlying truths that are independent from both the historical context, and the mind thinking them. But Bhaskar claims that there is no ultimate theory, neither in science nor in philosophy. Thus, Bhaskar's transcendental questioning implies that future transcendental arguments can explain the world or our mind better than current ones do.

To summarise, two aspects of Bhaskar's thinking are essential. First, a world without

science is possible, but science without a world is impossible. Because of this, the world must be a certain way. Second, Bhaskar adapts transcendental arguments to include conclusions about both our mind and the world.

2.2 Transcendental realism: vindicating a distinct philosophical ontology

According to Bhaskar (1998a), knowledge has two sides since it is concerned with two types of objects. On the one hand we possess knowledge *of* so-called 'intransitive objects of knowledge,' such as the speed of light; and on the other hand we possess knowledge *about* so-called 'transitive objects of knowledge,' such as theories, models, et cetera (16). The naming stems from the fact that intransitive objects of knowledge are not subject to change, while the transitive objects of knowledge change. In other words: the things we think of prevail while what we think about them changes.

Let us focus on the relationship between science and *transitive* objects of knowledge. As discussed in the previous section, we can imagine a world without science. Because transitive objects of knowledge are produced by science, it follows that we can imagine a world without transitive objects of knowledge. If there is no science, a fact that we claim to be possible, transitive objects of knowledge cease to exist too. Nevertheless, there is a dependence the other way around: We cannot imagine science without transitive objects of knowledge, because we need knowledge to produce knowledge. 'Knowledge,' as Bhaskar (1998a, 17) writes 'depends upon knowledge-like antecedents.' As Collier (1994, 51) argues, through the work of science, we continuously 'transform' transitive objects of our knowledge (*about* theories, models, et cetera) for deepening our knowledge *of* intransitive objects.

Now, let us focus on the relation of science and *intransitive* objects of knowledge. In the previous section we already concluded that we cannot imagine science without the world. By means of our new wording, this implies that we cannot imagine science without intransitive objects of knowledge. Transitive objects of knowledge depend on both themselves *and* intransitive objects of knowledge. New knowledge is 'a socially produced knowledge of a natural (man-independent) thing' (Bhaskar 1998c, 65).

Hence, we see that science is *dependent* on both intransitive *and* transitive objects of knowledge whereas intransitive objects of knowledge are *independent* from both science and its transitive objects of knowledge. This has two important implications.

First, it makes intransitive objects of knowledge ontologically distinct from transitive ones; second, it makes the mere existence of science an accident. Since science is not a necessarily symptom of the world, it emerged spontaneously. Thus, it is legitimate to ask the following two transcendental questions: 'What must the world be like for science to be possible?' And: 'What must science be like to give us knowledge of intransitive objects (of this kind)?' (Bhaskar 1998a, 18)

To answer the first question, Bhaskar descends deeper and deeper into ontology, from the experiences we make in scientific experiments, to events that we cannot observe, and to the causal laws that we discover by means of science. Following this, he respectively delineates three domains: the *empirical*, the *actual*, and the *real*.

The domain of the *empirical* includes the experiences we make when we experiment. Since science is a spontaneous symptom of the world, there must exist an ontological domain where structures are independent from whether we perceive them or not. Bhaskar calls this domain the *actual* because there structures are actualised. It includes both the experience we make when we experiment and the events that happen without us experiencing them (in other words, the events that we observe and those that we do not observe).

In the *actual*, events are triggered continuously. Thus, we can say that what triggers them is the 'causal agent of the sequence of events' (25). On the contrary to positivst views, it is not the causal agent of the causal law. Through experimenting we are able to trigger the sequence of events but not the causal law itself.

The causal law and the sequence of events are not the same because for the sequence of events to be triggered (at any time) there must be 'something' that is ontologically distinct and can actualise in the *actual*. It must be ontologically distinct from both the events and the experience. Thus, we need to conceptualise an additional domain called the *real*. This domain includes causal laws, events, and experiences.

Following this, when we experience a constant conjunction of events, this does not need to be a causal law per se. This is since causal laws are independent from both events and experiences, and events are independent from experiences. In such a situation, Bhaskar (1998a, 27) speaks of causal laws being 'out of phase' with both patterns of events and experiences. This is the situation of an open system. In a working experiment though, causal laws, constant conjunctions, and experiences are in an one-to-one relationship and describe a closed system.

In light of the three domains, Bhaskar (1998a, 19) can demarcate his philosophy from

prevalent philosophical traditions: classical empiricism and transcendental idealism. In the case of classical empiricism, 'science becomes a kind of epiphenomenon of nature' (19); thus it *reacts* to what it perceives. In the case of transcendental idealism, the natural world is constructed by the mind; thus science imposes what it thinks of the world on the world. Hence, both philosophies are victims of the same mistake that Bhaskar (1998a, 27) terms 'epistemic fallacy.'

Prevalent philosophies deny the existence of a philosophical ontology that is distinct from scientific ontologies and conflate epistemology with ontology. While answering epistemological questions, they also give ontological answers

> […] whereas transcendental realism asks explicitly what the world must be like for science to be possible, classical philosophy asked merely what science would have to be like for the knowledge it yielded to be justified. (32)

These new insights let us re-conceptualise causal laws as 'generative mechanisms.' According to Bhaskar (1998a, 36) these mechanisms

> endure even when inactive and act even where, as in open systems, there is no one-to-one relationship between the causal law representing the characteristic mode of operation of the mechanism and the particular sequence of events that occurs.

Moreover we can re-conceptualise causal powers as 'tendencies.' Since there is some-thing that acts, we can say this thing is a causal agent, and it possesses some kind of causal power. However, because generative mechanisms endure outside of closed systems too, we cannot say that they possess causal *powers*. '[P]owers are potentialities which may or may not be exercised.' (37) Powers can vanish. So, it is more useful to speak of generative mechanisms holding 'tendencies' since tendencies may be exercised but they also may endure 'without being realized or manifest in any particular outcome' (37).

Concluding, in transcendental realism, the world consists of three domains: the *real*, the *actual*, and the *empirical*. The *real* is everything that exists, independent from whether it is natural or social, or whether we know it or are unaware of it. In the *real*, things have tendencies to interact with each other in a particular way. The most important aspect to note here is that tendencies, even when hidden, exist and structures in the *real* do possess them. The *actual* focuses on triggered tendencies, that is, the actual events. But the underlying mechanisms, which are part of the *real*, are not part of the *actual*. The *empirical* is what we perceive, excluding both the actual events and the underlying mechanisms, but incorporates our perceptions of them.

* * *

Now we know what the *world* must be like for science to be possible. But for *science* to be the way it is, not only must we differentiate between intransitive and transitive objects of knowledge and our world's three domains (*real*, *actual*, and *empirical*), we must also think of the world as stratified, that is, characterised by multiple strata (Bhaskar 1998c, 67).

In academia we explain one stratum after the other. We witness that scholars use what they discovered as new base for new discoveries. In turn, these discoveries will serve as base for even newer discoveries. Thus Collier (1994, 109-10) differentiates between two different types of explanation: vertical explanation and horizontal explanation. When we pursue vertical explanation, we explain one mechanism of one stratum by means of another mechanism on another stratum. When we pursue horizontal explanation, we explain an event by means of a mechanism and a stimulus on the same stratum.

An example is the endeavour to understand smaller and smaller objects (Bhaskar 1998c, 66-7). For a while scientists have been persuaded that atoms are the smallest objects of the world, until they discovered even smaller components: quarks. Thus they transformed their already existing transitive objects of knowledge into new ones by moving from one stratum to another, pursuing vertical explanation. On each of these strata they developed models that describe the characteristics of the related entities.

Stratification does not imply a reductionist standpoint though. It does not necessarily relate to endeavours that focus on understanding smaller and smaller objects. Another example for stratification is how we conceptualise light. The behaviour of light can be conceptualised in form of waves and in form of particles. These conceptualisations are mutually independent.

Science seems to be stratified, so for it to be possible, the world is stratified too. Hence, the world consists of different *types* of underlying mechanisms. By disclosing them 'we can see how knowledge of newly discovered strata,' as Bhaskar (1998c, 67) puts it, 'may correct knowledge of less fundamental strata.'

By accepting that our world is stratified, we can explain why there is scientific development. Once we acquired knowledge on one stratum, we move on to the next, and science develops further on. Even if, at some point, we are convinced that we acquired 'ultimate' knowledge of one stratum, we can never be sure that the mechanisms we

discovered are independent from underlying mechanisms of another stratum; so even if there is a level that is 'ultimate' we would not know (68, 72).

It can also be shown that we cannot reduce one stratum to another. The tendency that a thing possesses on one stratum persists even if we have disclosed it. Thus endeavours that investigate different strata are equally important. Bhaskar (1998c, 72) epitomises this with an enlightening example: 'Dogs do not lose their power to bark when we understand how they do so, just as glass does not cease to be brittle when we know its molecular structure.' Every stratum has its necessity because the tendencies, which we try to disclose, continue to act in the *real* on every stratum.

Different strata of the world are represented by different disciplines (and their sub-disciplines). They are inquiries that strive for the same *real* thing just by different means. Physics, chemistry, biology, psychology, sociology, geography et cetera, each addresses particular types of mechanisms.

Different types of mechanisms are related in terms of emergence, and sometimes also in terms of composition Collier (1994, 107-34). Let us first consider emergence. Transcendental realism claims that strata are irreducible, that is, a 'lower' stratum (physics) cannot supersede a 'higher' stratum (sociology). Rather, higher strata *emerge* from lower strata. Things from lower strata (chemical substances) are governed by mechanisms of the lowest strata, while things from higher strata (humans) are governed by mechanisms of *both* the lowest and higher strata. Stratification has neither a beginning nor an end: on the one hand, we can dig deeper and deeper into ontology, and, on the other hand, higher things, such as humans, form social groups, institutions, nations, et cetera which all emerge from one another (116, 137-168) and all are subject to investigation.

Since the tendency of things prevails on a stratum in question even if we understood it, we cannot reduce a higher-level mechanism to a lower-level mechanism as proclaimed by ontological and epistemological reductionists. Setting strata in relation to each other is only possible through vertical explanation, that is, explaining one mechanism of one stratum by means of another mechanism on another stratum. Obviously, to do so we must have knowledge of one stratum first. In science we witness that first we must have knowledge of 'higher' strata to explain 'lower' strata. How would we explain pain on the stratum of physics, if we had not understood it on the strata of biology and psychology? (113-4) If we did not know what 'pain' is, we would not know what to look for.

Since we now understood the implications of emergence, let us turn to composition. We said, sometimes strata are also in relation of composition. Things of an emergent stratum (for example humans) are composed of things of the stratum they are rooted in (for example chemical substances). Because of this, things of higher strata are governed by multiple mechanisms of different types.

The applicability of relations of both emergence and composition 'allows for the coexistence of holistic and analytical approaches' (Collier 1994, 188). Each type of inquiry attempts to understand different kinds of underlying mechanisms on different strata while both of them are relevant.

Concluding, the idea that *there exists a philosophical ontology distinct from scientific ontologies* implies that speaking of 'things' or 'underlying mechanisms' refers to entities that we can neither perceive nor imagine. We must separate our scientific ontologies, for example the idea that physics is concerned with 'everything physical' (whatever that be), or that sociology is concerned with 'everything social' (whatever that be), from our philosophical ontology. Collier (1994, 25) writes that 'philosophy's *manner of work* is pure reason, but its raw materials are not.'

Philosophy can tell us what the world *in its most abstract sense as we cannot even imagine* must look like for science to be possible to act upon its strata. This work, then, manifests in particular scientific ontologies, epistemologies, and methodologies. In this context, the *empirical* is what we perceive; the *actual* is the first underlying 'layer' that incorporates the events that we perceive and, despite this, any other event that we do not perceive; while the last 'layer,' the *real*, incorporates all of the aforementioned *plus* the underlying mechanisms, which are neither directly perceivable nor imaginable at all. The *real* manifests through the *actual* and the *empirical* only indirectly.

The previous paragraphs have already implied the consequences of transcendental realism for social sciences in an introductory manner. In the next section we discuss the implications for the social sciences in more detail. We do so by turning to the next important step in critical realism's development: critical naturalism.

2.3 Critical naturalism: an opportunity for the social sciences

Critical naturalism is the application of transcendental realism for the social sciences. It is the answer to the question: 'If we accept transcendental realism, how must the object under study in the social sciences look like to make social inquiry possible?' As will

become clearer below, in this context critical naturalism fights at two fronts: against reductive naturalism, and against social constructivism.

This fight is visible in the essence of the two words that construct the term itself. On the one hand, 'critical naturalism' applies some sort of naturalism since it accepts that we can pursue science in the social realm objectively. The fact that intransitive objects of knowledge exist independently from us goes against the perception of social constructivists who claim that knowledge is created subjectively and compels the world to be in a particular way. On the other hand, 'critical naturalism' asserts that inquiries in the social realm cannot be reduced to intransitive objects of knowledge, which objects to naturalism. In addition it says that it is impossible to detach social entities from meaning.

Bhaskar (1998b) constructs critical naturalism in four steps: First, he introduces a 'transformational model of social activity;' second, he argues that social forms are *real* objects; third, he advocates that social *science* is possible because societies have emergent features; and finally, he objects toward what is known as the 'fact/value dichotomy.' His argument goes that social science will become emancipatory, if it discloses prevalent relations within society (207).

To illustrate the argument for the existence of social forms, the concept of magnetic fields, which is widely accepted in the natural sciences, is used as an allegory. On the contrary to social forms, we do not question the existence of magnetic fields although we cannot directly perceive them too. So why are social forms widely questioned and magnet fields widely accepted? As it is the case with magnetic fields, it is the effects of social forms that are visible.

To vindicate social forms, Bhaskar (1998b, 212-6) summarises existent models that relate 'society' and 'person.' He then objects to all of them and presents his own conception. There exist three models: the Weberian stereotype 'Voluntarism' (individuals create society), the Durkheimian stereotype 'Reification' (society forms individuals), and a 'Dialectical' conception of both (individuals create society, society forms individuals, individuals create society, and so forth). These models are schemed in Figures 2.1, 2.2, 2.3, and 2.4.

All of these models fail to account for the relations between individuals or different social forms (nations, groups, et cetera). The third model even incorporates the problems of the first and second model: voluntaristic idealism and mechanistic determinism respectively (214). The main problem I see is the following: Each model

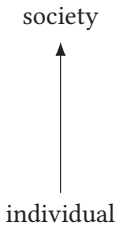

Figure 2.1: Weberian stereotype (Bhaskar 1998b, 212)

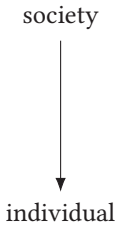

Figure 2.2: Durkheimian stereotype (Bhaskar 1998b, 212)

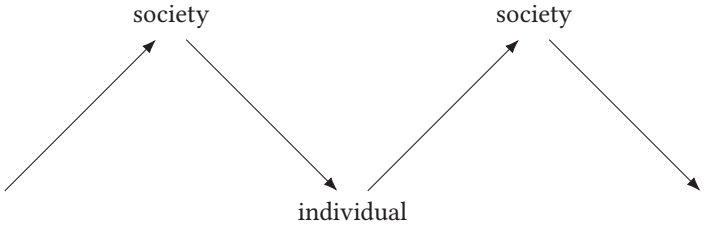

Figure 2.3: Dialectical conception (Bhaskar 1998b, 213)

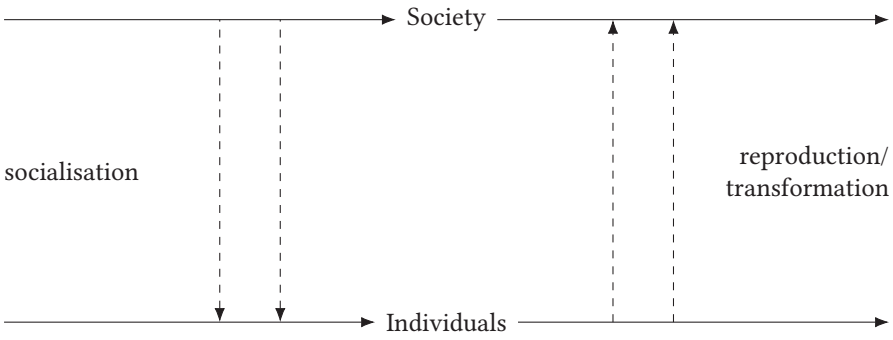

Figure 2.4: Transformational model of the society/person connection (Bhaskar 1998b, 217)

takes some account of 'time' as premiss. First there is either society or the individual, and subsequently there is the second. In the dialectical model, this process repeats continuously. Thus, at some point we would arrive at the question: 'What was first: society or individual?' which is misleading because in light of the questions, all of the models debilitate.

Since none of these models can account for the society/individuals relation, Bhaskar (1998b, 217) proposes what he calls a 'transformational model of the society/person connection.' The model and his ideas on positions, practices, and relations that we will discuss below, are referred to as 'transformational model of social activity.'

In the text in question, he fails to connect the model to transcendental realism explicitly, so let us discuss the following: In light of the previous section, individuals and people are entities of different strata. These entities, to recall Collier, can be in relation of both composition and emergence. Bhaskar (1998b, 215) concludes:

> Society is both the ever-present *condition* (material cause) and the continually reproduced *outcome* of human agency. And [social] praxis is both work, that is conscious *production*, and (normally unconscious) *reproduction* of the conditions of production, that is society.

Thus, society and individuals possess certain causal powers and influence each other. They are ever-present, that is, they can only exist in relation to each other, while none creates the other. Rather, individuals transform and reproduce society; and society socialises individuals. They are ontologically distinct but stand in relation.

Let us consider some deficiencies of Bhaskar's argument for the sake of clarification. The arguments above derive from transcendental realism, a *philosophical ontology*. However, the elaborations of Bhaskar do include non-philosophical accounts. He moved from a philosophical argument to an argument he fights *within* the social sciences. So, we must be careful not to intermingle his wording with the one by transcendental realism. The crux of the matter becomes visible in the following formulation (219, emphasis by me):

> Society […] is an articulated ensemble of tendencies and powers which, *unlike natural ones*, exist only as long as they (or at least some of them) are being exercised; are exercised in the last instance via the intentional activity of human beings; and are not necessarily space-time invariant.

In the emphasis above, Bhaskar differentiates between social and natural entities, which I think is dangerous because it may raise what it actually tries to object to: the account of a fundamental difference between the natural and the social sciences.

His wording is imprecise and must be formulated more clearly: In regard to scientific ontology, natural and social objects are different; but in regard of philosophical ontology, natural and social objects are the same. Thus, accounts of transcendental realism still apply. The difference lies only in terms of the strata that the natural and social sciences address. Social objects of knowledge emerge on higher strata than natural objects of knowledge while being composed of intransitive objects of knowledge of lower strata (remember Collier's argument concerning different relations between strata: emergence and composition). From the ontological perspective of scientists (not philosophers), these differences manifest in distinct scientific ontologies.

Hence, 'human sciences [...] take intransitive objects like any other' while, as Bhaskar (1998b, 227) puts it, 'the categorial properties of such objects differ.' These differing characteristics impose certain *scientifically* 'ontological limits on the possibility of naturalism' (224, 218). In other words, in science (not philosophy) we witness different ontological features of social structures (218-9):

1. Social structures, unlike natural structures, do not exist independently of the activities they govern.
2. Social structures, unlike natural structures, do not exist independently of the agents' conceptions of what they are doing in their activity.
3. Social structures, unlike natural structures, may be only relatively enduring (so that the tendencies they ground may not be universal in the sense of space-time invariant).

As we have mentioned, other models lack an account of the relations within and between social structures. On the contrary, the three points above include such a relational conception. First, social structures are inherently connected to the actions they pursue; second, social structures are internally related to their own perception of their activities; and third, social structures are related in such a way that they cannot exist without what they are related to. As for example visible in the transformational model of the society/person connection, individuals and society will cease to exist, if one of them ceases to exist.

Nevertheless, the fact that social structures are ontological distinct and related to each other simultaneously makes progress and history possible (217). In this context, the function of people is twofold. By making social products, they make the conditions of their making. Thus, we need social-scientific and not natural-scientific explanations when we deal with higher strata. Obviously, natural objects impose certain constrains on social objects, because they are in relation of composition, but it is the relation of emergence that makes social *science* possible and necessary. Emergence creates distinct

intransitive objects that come with their own tendencies and are called 'social.'

Epitomising these ideas, it is positions, practices, and relations that are the most important in the social sciences (221). Practices are significant because people *make* social products and the conditions of their making. Positions are significant because they, on the contrary to individuals, imply that it is the relation of an individual to others that is important. In regard to relations, additionally interesting are natural surroundings because they impose constrains, and interpersonal relations because they affect positions.

Concluding, there are two difficulties in social inquiry which hinder the pursuit of classical philosophies. First, we cannot set up experiments to test our theories because on the strata of social structures the system is too open; second, society is inherently connected to the effects that we want to investigate because they are, while ontologically distinct, related (225).

Since classical philosophies cannot address open systems, they can offer neither scientific critique nor human self-emancipation (227). On the contrary, critical realism can offer these in due consideration of transcendental arguments.

Bhaskar (1998b, 220-30) proposes to use transcendental arguments in the social sciences. Again, he lacks some clarity on how to do so, so let us think of how to initiate a transcendental argument within the social sciences. As said, positions, practices, and relations are crucial. Hence, a question for departure can be the following: 'What must the positions, practices, and relations be like for the issue under investigation to be possible?' We see, in virtue of scientific transcendental arguments, the social sciences get an explanatory turn. As we did in the philosophical elaborations, pursuing a transcendental argument helps us to circumvent epistemological problems (see also Collier 1994, 166-7).

Scientific transcendental arguments open the door for critique because

> such a transcendental analysis in social science, in showing (when it does) the historical conditions under which a certain set of categories may be validly applied, *ipso facto* shows the conditions under which they may not be applied. (Bhaskar 1998b, 231)

Now the argumentation got a turn that requires us to address what is known as the 'fact/value dichotomy.' Let us first consider the traditional standpoint, and then discuss the arguments of critical naturalists.

Especially the positivist school claims that (a) facts may not be concerned with values, and (b) values may not interfere with facts. Thus, science may not tell us what

to do, which opposes to the quotation above. The argument goes that sciences must be value-free because sciences are only concerned with facts. (We discussed these notions in the previous chapter.) However, as we showed, science is a social product which makes value-freeness within *every* science impossible. And especially in the social sciences, it is often values that are under investigation. So, instead of dropping them from our inquiries, we need to strive for 'maximum explanatory power' (Bhaskar 1998b, 238) to understand values as best as we can.

This raises the question: How can our investigations achieve maximum explanatory power? By disclosing false believes which, in turn, are responsible for misguided actions. For every discourse to be fruitful we must commit to truth, consistency, coherence, rationality, et cetera because 'they are a condition of the possibility of discourse in general.' (242) Since believes are social products, they are roots for our actions, and thus become inherently decisive. If they are false, they will misguide both discourse and action. Because of this it is not only sufficient to articulate that a certain belief is false, further any critic must state *how* one could come to such a belief, that is, *explaining* the belief itself (242). To explain the believe, we must disclose pertaining positions, actions, and relations associated with the issue in question.

By doing so, we transform social practices, society, and initiate change. While we explain, we acquire the transitive dimension of objects. Our knowledge is subject to permanent change because we remain uncertain about its correctness. We debate, discuss, and criticise what we elaborated, and try to improve our knowledge. Being critical naturalists and explaining the social world, we pursue 'explanatory critique' (Collier 1994, 170-90; also Sayer 2000, 158-71). By producing explanations about the social world, we disclose false beliefs, and, in turn, criticise social forms (institutions, organisations, et cetera) that perpetuate such beliefs. By criticising them, we indirectly (or directly) demand social forms that preserve true beliefs instead, which becomes visible through normative notions.

We proceeded the argument above under the premise that human agency is causal (Bhaskar 1998b, 207). In other words, we presupposed that people possess responsibility because they are capable of initiating change. A critic might raise the concern that individuals lack power to do so because they are determined by external conditions.

However, transcendental realism implies what Collier (1994, 118) calls 'stratified freedom.' We saw that our world is stratified, and different strata can be in relation of emergence and composition; thus, they are irreducible to each other. As a consequence,

the actions of intransitive objects of knowledge are irreducible too. One of the emergent powers (manifested in certain tendencies) that people share is 'the power to act on the ground of reasons.' (118) Indeed, as objects of higher strata, we possess powers of multiple strata since we are composed of and emerge from intransitive objects of a variety of lower strata (120). This gives us both certain freedom and certain responsibility, thus agency.

Now, let us conclude and summarise the aforementioned aspects through the perspective of Collier (1994) which will contribute further clarification. First and foremost, we cannot explain our world through conditions but a multiplicity of causes (125-6). This is because a conception of progress through conditions that are followed by causes presupposes our world to stand still concerning some aspects but to be mobile in others. But the *real* consists of tendencies – not conditions – that have effects on each other permanently and manifest in the *actual* through events that we perceive sometimes. Second, reasons, that is, our believes and desires, must be analysed as tendencies too, because sometimes they are exercised, sometimes they are not; in any event, an explanation is possible by investigating the deeper structures of reasons (155). Third, the social sciences are an explanatory science, a science without closure, and a science with hermeneutic premisses (161).

The great difference between the natural and social sciences is that, on the contrary to natural scientists, social scientists cannot *actualise* the abstractions of the objects under study (251). In the natural sciences, once there is some hypothesis about an issue in question, academics can implement closure and test what they assume. But in the social sciences experiments are impossible because they deal with strata that are far too open (see also 121). Nonetheless, like the natural sciences can emancipate society from nature, the social sciences can emancipate society from itself, that is, from prevalent false believes of and about it. As we just saw, transcendental arguments that manifest in explanatory critiques open us the door to an emancipatory social science.

Collier (1994, 198-9) summarises five conditions for practices to be emancipatory:

1. Our reasons must have effects, that is, we must act according to our reasons.
2. We must subscribe to values and believes. Otherwise, there is no sense in normative discourse.
3. Any critique must happen within the society it criticises, and the critique must be open to other critiques.

4. Possibilities for change must be feasible and needed. If they are not feasible, we cannot implement them. If they are not needed (by anybody), we will not implement them. Without willingness, change is not possible.
5. We must accept the notion of emergent powers, and these must be knowable to us. If we do not accept transcendental realism, we will maybe drift toward naturalism and demand natural (not social) change. If the powers in questions are not knowable to us, our explanation failed in the first place.

This has already been a long journey, but what is still left is a short critique of Collier (1994) and Sayer (2000). In my opinion, certain weaknesses of both texts hamper a correct understanding of why Bhaskar's ideas are logically consistent, and what they are actually about – these are worth mentioning.

Collier (1994) can only provide – as the sub-title of the book says – 'an introduction to Roy Bhaskar's Philosophy' in the sense that it positions the philosophy in a broader philosophical context. It does so by preparing the reader with knowledge about transcendental arguments, explaining their origin, and relating Kant's account of them to Bhaskar's; by criticising particular passages written by Bhaskar for lack of clarity; by providing references for further reading; by debunking some of Bhaskar's thoughts from philosophical terms; and eventually criticising critical naturalism for its positive outlook on *scientific* social inquiries (all of these aspects became clear in the previous passages). However, the departure of the thinking of Bhaskar, that is, what the philosophy rests upon, is never made clear. The departure is the differentiation between intransitive and transitive objects of knowledge, and the spontaneity of science. Not until page 31 the reader gets a glimpse of the spontaneity of science; not until page 50, the reader is introduced to the fact that objects of knowledge are twofold. But, as we saw, these construct the base for Bhaskar's entire argument. The reader cannot understand *why* Bhaskar constructs transcendental realism, and must assume that it is another philosophical postulate based on faith. But transcendental realism is different because it provides a distinct *philosophical* ontology.

In the first part of his book, Sayer introduces critical realism and its key features. There, in a section on 'Stratification and Emergence,' he writes (Sayer 2000, 12):

> In distinguishing the real, the actual and the empirical, critical realism proposes a "stratified ontology" in contrast to other ontologies which have "flat" ontologies populated by either the actual or the empirical, or a conflation of the two.

The formulation implies that our world is divided into three strata: *real*, *actual*, and *empirical*. But Sayer misunderstands Bhaskar. The statement is wrong. It conflates two distinct features of transcendental realism: first, the three domains; and second, the concept of stratification. These are two different and distinct characteristics of our world. For science to be possible, the world must consists of the three domains; *plus*, for science to be possible the way it is, it must be stratified. It is a small but decisive mistake.

These two examples demonstrate that both philosophers and social scientists fail to give a full account of Bhaskar's philosophy. In the following we will see how these mistakes perpetuate in applications of critical realism for political geography and international relations.

2.4 Misunderstandings in the geographico-political discourse

Let us investigate how critical realism is accommodated in international relations and political geography.

Although scholars of international relations have a well-developed tradition of contemplating about their discipline's meta-theoretical side, they considered possible consequences of critical realism only recently. In a forum by *Millenium*, different academics discussed the importance of scientific realism and critical realism for international relations theory. Nonetheless, the contributions by Joseph (2007), Kurki (2007), and Wight (2007) as a whole provide a rather puzzling understanding of 'critical realism,' 'scientific realism,' and 'realism' in general.

To a certain extent the scholars fail to distinguish between critical realism as a *philosophical* ontology and any scientific ontology or epistemology that has been developed in their field. The fact that international relations is concerned about theories that name themselves 'realisms' increases semantic difficulties (classical realism, realism, neorealism, defensive and offensive realism, to mention a view). In discourse about them it is easy to slip from one meaning to another, in such a way that one remains puzzled what is actually meant. This problem is addressed by Chernoff (2007) who, first of all, tries to clarify the differences between scientific and critical realism, and eventually criticises the misinterpretations by the aforementioned scholars. At the end he concludes that critical realism will not have a chance to gain further momentum

in international relations because it lacks 'epistemic, methodological, philosophical or pragmatic benefits' (Chernoff 2007, 407).

Brown (2007) foresees a much more positive future for critical realism in international relations theory. He asserts the philosophy might even be able to agitate a fifth great debate. But, instead of looking forward to this possibility, he hopes that discourse concerning an adaptation will not bear fruit because it could 'revitalise debates over epistemology and ontology.' Similar to Monteiro and Ruby (2009), he is afraid of the impact that philosophical foundations can have for scientific discourse – as we saw, scholars of international relations know what they are talking about here. But if the influence of critical realism on debates within international relations encourages discourse about novel adaptations of Marxism, he is 'all for it' (Brown 2007, 416).

From my point of view critical realism has a difficult stance in the discipline of international relations because of the positivist (thus empiricist) bulwark that has been developing in political science over the years in general, which we mentioned in the previous chapter. The word 'realism' has been used completely different from its usage in philosophy. And 'theory' (opposed for example to Bhaskar's conception of it as simply something abstract) has become a bloated terminus – busy with the meta-theoretical discussions that have continuously perpetuated in the field, scholars of international relations neglected the rise of another 'realism' of completely different form. So, it is no longer puzzling how the philosophical movement propelled by critical realism in the 1970s and 1980s took decades to be considered a possible origin for new disputes within international relations theory.

The situation in geography was completely different. According to Mäki and Oinas (2004, 1771) geographers simply 'grabbed' what was available to them that objected to the solely quantitative and positivist developments of their discipline during the same period. Since this was exactly when Bhaskar and other philosophical realists published their ideas, their contributions were welcomed. Geography encountered critical realism. Nevertheless, similar to what we just mentioned concerning the forum in *Millenium*, often the philosophy remains misunderstood as either an epistemology, a method or yet another dogma (Yeung 1997). And if it is understood correctly, it is criticised for its lack of methodological guidance. But, as Yeung (1997) points out correctly: First, critical realism has never been intended to present a method (it is a philosophical ontology); and second, each discipline is required to develop a suitable method on top of critical realism by and of itself. (With the text at hand, we try to achieve this for geographico-political

disciplines.)

Realism has always been present in geography. But since *critical* realism arrived, it has helped geographers to pursue their research more 'self-consciously' (Sayer 2001, 2980-3): The philosophy helps to address the uniqueness of geographical phenomena; it can account for research that addresses 'spatial differentiation and uneven development.' Because it was used for localities studies, geographers have raised fear about their colleagues misunderstanding critical realism and privileging particular scales. Nevertheless, the philosophy itself endorses research of multiple strata, and investigating a phenomenon on more than one level through abstraction simultaneously.

In regard to international relations, we already hinted that positivism has had great influence on wording, which raises confusion about the meaning of particular terms. Likewise, in regard to geography Pratt (2009, 379) adds that the different meanings 'from (naive) realism (or empiricism) […] to the strong version of (transcendental) realism' complicates comprehension. These difficulties notwithstanding, critical realism is appreciated in human geography, economic geography, urban and social geography, as well as sociology (381-2). While guides for applied research based on critical realism are welcomed, these contributions are also criticised because 'realism risks being stripped of its philosophical baggage and simply presented as the advocacy of "common sense"' (382). 'Common sense' because critical realism is open to a variety of research approaches. The risk lies in the misinterpretation to read methodological pluralism as support for any type of research to be possible.[1]

Certainly, critical realism has not only been welcomed in geography. C. Rose (1990) summarises positive and negative reactions, and proposes 'pragmatic realism' to solve the turbulences. This is not the place to criticise this new approach in detail (although there is reason to do so),[2] but let us outline the review about positive and negative responses. Geographers see positively that critical realism can help to reconsider 'reference, meaning and truth' instead of addressing 'objects, events and meaning' solely (168). In addition, geographers appreciate that the philosophy helps to dispose of

1. I see such a tendency also visible in conceptualising so-called 'intensive' and 'extensive' research as done by Sayer (2000, 21).

2. From my point of view, pragmatic realism (a) is an adapted version of transcendental idealism hiding under 'realism;' (b) cannot compensate the failures that are raised toward critical realism in C. Rose (1990); and (c) cannot give account to the advantages of critical realism that are mentioned at the beginning of the article. Further, C. Rose (1990) question the privileged status of critical realism, but critical realism is indeed somewhat original because it proposes, unlike classical empiricism and transcendental idealism, a distinct philosophical ontology.

an 'outmoded' (C. Rose 1990, 169) understanding of causality and accepts that, next to physical causes, reasons can be causes too.

But other scholars of the field blame critical realism to be too hypothetical because the *real* will always remain hidden. They criticise that contingency plays a much too prominent role in critical realism. Thus, they ask, 'how does a realist have knowledge of layers of reality which remain hidden to everyone else?' (171) In light of the explanations above, we can counter that transcendental realism, the philosophical ontology of critical realism, should primarily be understood as an *enhancement* of scientific ontologies; and it advocates that it is difficult but possible for science to generate outcome. Fallibility is a restriction scientists have had to deal with since Popper conceptualised his concept of empirical falsifiability. That we may never now 'the ultimate truth' is a well-known circumstance.

The reactions of geographers to critical realism are multifaceted. To mention two examples: Roberts (2001) provides a Marxist critique of critical realism, claiming that the philosophy, when applied, is too much internally related and cannot address the historical context of what is investigated. Lawson and Staeheli (1990, 17) advocate the usage of critical realism, not only because it considers place 'integral to the structure of social relations.'

Overall, a literature review shows that 'realism' is sometimes used to refer to Bhaskar's philosophy, sometimes to a naive common sense realism, and sometimes to something in-between. This makes it difficult to demarcate which 'realism' scholars actually address, and how they address transcendental realism in particular – whether positively or negatively.

Because of the different meanings of 'realism' in geographic meta-discourse, Mäki and Oinas (2004) differentiate between 'CoreRealism' and 'GeoRealism.' The first term relates to the underlying philosophical proposition of realism as developed by Bhaskar and others in the 1970s and 80s; the second term relates to the reading of the philosophy by geographers, and the construct they created by shaping the philosophy according to their needs throughout the recent decades. According to Mäki and Oinas (2004, 1763) GeoRealism cannot live up to CoreRealism because of 'resource narrowness' and 'domain narrowness.' GeoRealism ignores contemporary debates about realism in philosophy, and impedes itself to particular research topics unnecessarily. This dilemma developed without geographers noticing it, according to the authors.

Let us take a closer look on these bottlenecks. In regard to resource narrowness, geo-

graphers are not necessarily forced to accept every new idea that has been contributed by philosophers, but it might enlighten theoretical disputes in human geography (1761-3). Mäki and Oinas (2004, 1763) claim that GeoRealism dropped notions of ontological, semantic, and epistemological realism that have developed throughout recent decades. In regard to domain narrowness, GeoRealism dissociates itself from social constructivist accounts that are actually pro-realist because it considers them anti-realist. For example, even postmodern academics such as Michel Foucault can be read as realists (see Woodiwiss and Pearce 2005). But GeoRealism has imposed a particular metaphysics of causation, society, and methodology of research on geographico-political disciplines (Mäki and Oinas 2004, 1763).

Today, we are faced with a 'a narrow monopolistic usage of "realism"' which results in a neglect of the philosophy in recent meta-theoretical debates of the discipline (Mäki and Oinas 2004, 1772, 1774; see also Pratt 2009; Sayer 2001). As a consequence of GeoRealism, CoreRealism has eventually become unalluring since the limitations of the former have been foisted on the latter. Hence, the authors provide reasons for the misunderstanding of realism as discussed above – no matter whether as epistemology, method, or dogma. In this chapter we already emphasised that critical realism (transcendental realism in particular) is a philosophical ontology, thus clarified its original purpose.

To conclude this chapter, we demonstrated that critical realists can object to positivists by saying: 'Our critical and emancipatory notions stem from the fact that the world consists of multiple strata and our knowledge about it is fallible,' and in the same breath address the idealists appending: 'However, there exists a world independent from us, and objectivity can be sustained to a certain extent because of the existence of the *real*.' We encountered a philosophical foundation that 'seeks to avoid both scientism and "science-envy"', as Sayer (2000, 3) puts it. Critical realism is a third way between naturalism, empiricism, and positivism, on the one hand; and interpretivism, the critical school, and postmodernism on the other hand (Sayer 2000, 2; also Collier 1994, 237). This is achieved by differentiating between two types of knowledge (transitive and intransitive); conceptualising three domains (*real*, *actual*, and *empirical*); the stratification of both the world and science whose strata are in relations of emergence and composition; the transformational model of social activity that argues that society consciously produces and reproduces itself by means of positions, practices, relations, and false believes; and

the concept of stratified freedom that gives social forms both will and responsibility. Thus, critical realism provides insightful solutions to the difficulties of social inquiry.

In the next two chapters we will translate critical realism 'into concrete [methodological] propositions,' as requested by Harvey (2002, 164). This will be done by fusing the core of critical realism with 'phronetic social science' that is developed by Bent Flyvbjerg and the notion of '*géopolitiques*' by Yves Lacoste. Let us start by outlining phronetic social science in the next chapter.

Chapter 3

Phronetic social science: real(ist) social science?

In the previous chapters we became familiar with the challenges that social sciences face to maintain their stance as *scientific* inquiries. We encountered critical realism as a solution and learned that challenges and answers by the philosophy are picked up in geographico-political disciplines. Positive and negative responses come to the conclusion that the philosophy lacks substantial advice. While the transformational model of social activity provides ideas for conducting critical realism in the social sciences, the previous chapter has shown that the model does not provide a full-fledged methodology. Moreover, we saw that geography, by distancing itself from realism's core arguments, has developed some sort of 'GeoRealism' that is criticised to be of no avail philosophically and methodologically ambiguous in like manner.

Thus, the aim of this chapter is to make the first step in identifying cornerstones for a methodology based on critical realism that can be conducted in geographico-political disciplines. The notions of an emancipatory research approach that became known as 'phronetic social science' will help us to do so. Building upon ideas by Aristotle and Foucault, Flyvbjerg depleted science of theoretical arguments, and argued for praxis. He developed three pillars that can help us to provide a novel critical realist methodology for political geography. Certainly, successfully challenging prevailing traditions that have endured for decades cannot be achieved thus easily. As we will see, phronetic social science is criticised from different angles. The approach undermines theory at large, and fails to incorporate an account of spatiality.

3.1 Meeting Aristotle and Foucault

Fifteen years ago, Bent Flyvbjerg introduced 'phronetic social science' ([2001] 2011). By fusing ideas of Aristotle that propose general principles for scientific inquiry and Michel Foucault's conceptualisation of 'power,' Flyvbjerg showed how social sciences can be emancipatory and have practical impact. In his treatise *Making Social Science Matter* argues that the social sciences are inherently different from the natural sciences, thus, require distinct research approaches. According to Flyvbjerg, the social sciences require research that 'deconstruct[s] the conventional scientific ideal of the social sciences, with its emphasis on theory and context-independence' ([2001] 2011, 49). This claim is based on the re-discovery of three terms that were coined by Aristotle (57):

> **Episteme** Scientific knowledge. Universal, invariable, context-independent. Based on general analytical rationality. The original concept is known today from the terms 'epistemology' and 'epistemic'.
>
> **Techne** Craft/art. Pragmatic, variable, context-dependent. Oriented toward production. Based on practical instrumental rationality governed by a conscious goal. The original concept appears today in terms such as 'technique', 'technical', and 'technology'.
>
> **Phronesis** Ethics. Deliberation about values with reference to praxis. Pragmatic, variable, context-dependent. Oriented toward action. Based on practical value-rationality. The original concept has no analogous contemporary term.

According to Flyvbjerg, *episteme* and *techne* found their representation in today's philosophy of science whereas *phronesis* remains missing. Since their entirety is necessary for successful scientific inquiry, the lack of *phronesis* questions the current modus operandi of the social sciences.

Flyvbjerg combines these notions with insights on the concept of power as postulated by Foucault (121-2): First, power relations are inherent and underlying in any type of relations (from personal, economic, to diplomatic) while not necessarily limiting but influencing these. Second, power is not ordered toward a particular direction, that is, 'both the dominant and dominated enter into relations of power' (121). Third, power cannot be possessed, thus passed or gained since it is an exercised practice. And fourth, power always comes with some sort of resistance, thus resistance is an indicator for power relations. Because of these notions, the phronetic researcher must ask the following questions in regard to power relations (123):

> What are the most immediate and the most local power relations operating, and how do they operate? How has the active exercise of power in the relations being investigated affected the possibilities for the further exercise of power, with the resulting reinforcement of certain power relations and the attenuation of others? How are power relations linked

> together, according to what logic and strategy? How have these relations made certain rationalities possible and others impossible, and how do the rationalities support or oppose the power relations? How can the games of power be played differently?

These questions demonstrate that power and its implications are important for phronetic investigations, and, as we will see later, they enable us to show that Flyvbjerg's ideas include realist notions.[1]

By combining Aristotle's ideas on *episteme*, *techne*, and *phronesis* with Foucault's conceptualisation of power, Flyvbjerg attempts to develop an alternative approach that challenges prevalent research conceptions in the social sciences. The entanglement of Aristotle and Foucault calls for social inquiry that 'effectively deals with public deliberation and praxis, rather than being strangled with [...] vainly attempts to emulate natural science' (129). The social sciences are considered different from the natural sciences per se.

Flyvbjerg's efforts fell on fertile ground. Ten years later, Flyvbjerg, Landman and Schram (2012c) were able to provide a collection that documents research that had been pursued in virtue of phronesis. The contributions vary from analyses of mega projects, media, and policy to research in inequality studies, political science, educational studies, and geosurveillance. Further, the authors epitomise the theory behind phronetic social science in an introductory part and contribute that 'tension points' (Flyvbjerg, Landman and Schram 2012a) have emerged as linchpin for phronetics. In the meanwhile, the approach succeeded in strengthening the Perestroika movement (see Flyvbjerg 2004a; Laitin 2003; Monroe 2005; Schram and Caterino 2006) that aims at enhancing the practicability of political science. Last but not least, the approach was also echoed in the discipline of international relations (see for example Brown 2012).

3.2 Contextualising phronetic inquiry's three pillars

Flybjerg's research approach consists of three pillars: four key questions; nine methodological guidelines; and so-called 'tension points.' What follows is an overview of these sixteen cornerstones as they have been provided in literature on phronetics. While

1. Not to go beyond the scope of the thesis, I refrain from further discussing the concept of power (see for example Hayward 2000; Lukes 2004). Conceptualising power is difficult since 'we are not likely to produce – certainly not for some considerable amount of time to come – anything like a single, consistent, coherent "Theory of Power."' (Dahl 1957)

doing so, we will address each cornerstone shortly and set the path for a critical review that follows in the next section.

The four key questions are (Flyvbjerg, Landman and Schram 2012b, 5):

1. Where are we going with a specific problematic?
2. Who gains and who loses, and by which mechanism of power?
3. Is this development desirable?
4. What, if anything, should we do about it?

In this context, it is worth noting that the questions are inherently normative and call for emancipating society. By answering the first question, the phronetic researcher delineates the context of the object under study. Concurrently, researchers try to predict where development in society will lead us if the concern in question remains ignored. The second question addresses power relations that prevail within this context. 'Gaining' and 'loosing' indicate that the researcher must develop a particular attitude toward what is observed. To answer whether the development is desirable or not, requires phronetic researchers to strengthen their attitude. By answering the fourth question, researchers eventually articulate what society ought to do. Certainly, normativity comes with the danger to spur unilateral perceptions. We discussed this in the previous chapters and will put more focus on this aspect in regard to phronetic social science soon.

This normative momentum is also reflected in the nine methodological guidelines that Flyvbjerg develops. Discussing these will clarify the notions behind the key questions. They are as follows (numbering corresponds to Flyvbjerg 2004b, 290-302; cf. Flyvbjerg [2001] 2011, 130-40):

1. focus on values;
2. place power at the core of analysis;
3. get close to reality;
4. emphasise the 'little things;'
5. look at practice before discourse;
6. study cases and contexts;
7. ask 'how?' doing narrative;
8. move beyond agency and structure;
9. and dialogue with a polyphony of voices.

An analysis of the guidelines reveals that they are redundant, so let us categorise them. I delineate 'ethics,' 'ontology,' and 'emancipation.' In regard of *ethics*, Flybjerg

offers the first two guidelines that address power and values. Focusing on values, according to Flyvbjerg, means pursuing contextualism rather than foundationalism or relativism. The idea is to consider context-dependency, or as written: 'situational ethics,' which shall result in 'an attitude [...] not based on idiosyncratic morality or personal preferences, but on a common view among a specific reference group' (Flyvbjerg 2004b, 291). Flyvbjerg suspects criticism about the ambiguity of 'common view.' Thus, he further describes research context as 'socially and historically conditioned' and society and history as 'the only foundations we have, the only solid ground under our feet' (291). It remains open where to 'find' this ground, how to deal with it, and how it leads to a particular way of inquiry.

The crucial role of power within phronetic research has already been outlined above: power is meant to be put at the core of analysis. Since this calls for a phronetic concept of power, Flyvbjerg (2004b, 293) provides it by '[c]ombining the best of a Nietzschean/Foucauldian interpretation of power with the best of a Weberian/Dahlian one'. Flyvbjerg ([2001] 2011, 293) adds, in virtue of Focault, that power is inherently connected to knowledge, truth, and rationality; and he stresses that inquiries must concentrate on *how* power is practised within structures while who and why it is exercised is secondary. This, according to Flyvbjerg, will only be achieved if research focuses on 'specific practices.' These notions are similar to Bhaskar's demand to focus on positions, practices, and relations.

In regard to *ontology*, Flyvbjerg expects to get as close to reality as possible; to emphasise 'little things;' to study cases and contexts; and to go beyond agency and structure. While these guidelines are not restrained to ontological aspects (they also give epistemological and methodological advice), the essence of each guideline is of ontological concern.

According to Flyvbjerg, getting close to reality means to generate research results that have value for society. Is it possible for researchers to know what is 'valuable' and what is not? Flyvbjerg (2004b, 294) argues that the 'focus on relations of values of power [...] typically creates interest in the research by parties outside the research community' which can spur a dialogue between relevant parties, and thus creates value for society. The ultimate outcome, then, is research that is located *within* the contexts of the object under study. Obviously, this guideline brings us back to the dilemma about value-neutrality that we already discussed, and also Flyvbjerg (2004b, 294) is aware of. However, he claims that researchers can avoid the concerns about value judgements by

critically self-reflecting the own position throughout research. Thus, what is valuable for society can be traced objectively, according to him.

Flyvbjerg (2004b, 295) calls for a 'focus on minutiae' by 'searching for the Great within the Small and vice versa' to yield 'work that is at the same time as detailed and as general as possible.' His guideline to study cases and contexts points toward the same direction. In both guidelines, we can read his proclamation for case study research as fortified in a later publication. By objecting to five 'misunderstandings of case-study research,' Flyvbjerg (2006) presents an ode to case studies (cf. Gerring 2007). Flyvbjerg (2004b, 298) recommends to take into account what 'will best help answer the four phronetic questions at the core of the research.' In both texts he argues for the possibility to generalise from the particular.

Still concerned with ontology, the target of the eighth guideline is to move beyond agency and structure. By stating that 'it is a demanding task to account simultaneously for the structural influences [...] while crafting a clear, penetrating narrative or microanalysis' Flyvbjerg (2004b, 299-300) admits the difficulty behind this idea. Nonetheless, he continues to criticise that

> Researchers generally tend to generate either macro-level or micro-level explanations, ignoring the critical connections. Empirical work follows the same pattern. Instead of research that attempts to link macro-level factors and actors' choices in a specific phenomenon, scholars tend to dichotomize. Structural analyses and studies of actors each receive their share of attention, but in separate projects, by separate researchers.

Flyvbjerg then summarises research projects that exceptionally work in the overlapping areas of macro- and microanalysis. Thus, 'moving beyond agency and structure,' according to him, is difficult but possible. In the next chapter we will discuss how the critical realist concept of stratification justifies this move.

In regard to *emancipation*, we find guidelines five, seven, and nine: to look at practice before discourse; to ask 'how?' and do narrative; and to dialogue with a polyphony of voices. '[P]ractice is life' is the 'motto for phronetic planning research' (296). Because discourse is considered difficult to assess, and often misrepresents what real practices are, the idea is to avoid it. In comparison to discourse, practices are manifestations of what really happens and what is habitual in the context that is investigated, according to Flyvbjerg.

The seventh guideline demands to ask "how?" For responses, Flyvbjerg (2004b, 298-9) proposes story-telling (narrative) as one legitimate method. This is because 'event and conjuncture are crucial' and history and historicity are considered central.

Doing narrative is argued to be the one (if not the only) legitimate method for properly explaining events and their conjunctures (see also Landman 2012). Arguably, the focus on historical context comes with a neglect of spatial context. We will deal with this dilemma in more detail soon since it can be considered phronetic social science's greatest weakness.

Dialoguing with a polyphony of voices is the ninth and last advice. In this context, the implicit call for challenging the dominant *status quo* with help of the four key questions is striking. By debating undesirable power relations, phronetic research aims at disclosing them. In turn, this shall challenge the modus operandi they constitute within the research context. The phronetic approach 'incorporates, and, if successful, is itself incorporated into, a polyphony of voices, with no one voice, including that of the researcher, claiming final authority' (Flyvbjerg 2004b, 300). Hence, successful phronetic research stimulates a dialogue about the dominant state of affairs while considering that its conclusions and advices are not necessarily correct and fruitful. This aspect is similar to Bhaskar's standpoint that the philosophical ontology he developed is far from ultimate, and transitive objects are subject to change.

Let us now turn to tension points. They are essential for phronesis since they are 'power relations that are particularly susceptible to problematization and thus to change, because they are fraught with dubious practices, contestable knowledge and potential conflict' (Flyvbjerg, Landman and Schram 2012a, 288). They empower researchers to pursue three crucial tasks in phronetic inquiries (290):

1. actively identifying dubious practices within policy and social action;
2. undermining these practices through problematisation;
3. and constructively helping to develop new and better practices.

The overall idea of phronetic social science is to answer the four key questions by means of the guidelines; to find tensions points while undertaking this inquiry; to actively stimulate a dialogue about the findings and the object of study; and to challenge dominant habits associated within the power relations that were uncovered (Flyvbjerg 2004b; Flyvbjerg, Landman and Schram 2012a; Flyvbjerg 2012).

3.3 Lack of spatiality and other weaknesses

How do scholars react to these claims? The most general concern claims that Aristotelian and Foucauldian thought are incompatible. Caterino calls the connection of an

Aristotalian view of social inquiry, which is founded on the idea of collaboration, and Foucault's reflections on power an 'uneasy mix' (Caterino 2013, 749; see also Caterino 2006). In their defence, Flyvbjerg, Landman and Schram (2013, 759) argue that collaboration is not a necessary criteria for phronetic research. While they are right averting Caterino's argument, they do it the wrong way. Collaboration is a necessary criteria for phronetic inquiry because it is part of every dialogue; and as we have learned, pursuing dialogue is one of the guidelines of the approach. On the first read it seems that 'collaboration' and 'power' cannot go along; however, as we saw in regard to the Foucauldian interpretation, 'power' is inherent to every relation. This means that power is also part of any collaboration. Hence, at least in respect to 'collaboration' and 'power' the Aristotelian and Foucauldian thought go along indeed.

Another side raises the critique that the ideas behind phronetic social science hinge on an epistemological and methodological shift but neglect ontology. Gunnell (2013, 747-8) underlines that the inherent difference between natural and social inquiry is not the modus operandi but 'the fact that natural science *presents* rather than *represents* its subject matter' (748) That is, the difference lies in the subject matter (the scientific ontology), and not in the methodology. In like manner, when Flyvbjerg refers to 'reality' in his third guideline, it remains unclear what 'reality' means for the phronetic researcher. None of the contributions considered[2] explicitly mention ontological (and epistemological) foundations that pave the way for phronetic social science in the first place. While we already encountered arguments of this type in the previous chapters, we also saw that critical realism provides solutions by means of transcendental realism's encompassing ontology.

This also stands in connection to focus on the 'little things.' Which scale is to choose? What are the entities phronetic social science is concerned of? While the argument is to move beyond agency and structure, the future phronetic social scientist gets no hint where to move to. Yes, the structure/agency and related debates are misleading. Nonetheless, the reason why these debates emerged prevail: things on different scales behave differently. In the previous section I already indicated that stratification can be helpful in this context, which we will discuss in the subsequent chapter.

In the same breath we can mention that 'social and historical context,' while believed important in phronetic research (Flyvbjerg 2004b, 291), remains widely undefined. From the standpoint of transcendental realism we can agree that both are crucial, but it is

2. Flyvbjerg ([2001] 2011), Flyvbjerg (2004b), and Flyvbjerg, Landman and Schram (2012c)

only in transcendental realism where there are efforts taken to explain what a social and historical contextualisation means (cf. Roberts 2001). In critical naturalism both aspects are emphasised in the transformational model of social activity. Phronetic social science lacks such an explanation.

In relation to the neglect of ontology we can also mention the subordination of theory to practice. According to Flyvbjerg and his proponents, in the social sciences we have too much stressed the importance of theory. As demanded by the Perestroika movement, we shall focus on the practical implication of our research. But it remains unclear what Flyvbjerg means when he talks of 'theory.' I assume he speaks of 'theory' as it is depicted by positivists. If that is the case, I agree. However, if he uses the term to describe everything abstract (like Bhaskar does), I question his standpoint.

It is not necessarily the focus on theory but the focus on theory *production* in positivist virtue that should be of concern. In the recent chapter we saw that we need theory, that is, everything abstract or imperceivable, to make sense of the world because our world must be understood as constituted of abstract entities (intransitive and transitive objects of knowledge). Theory and practice stand in a reciprocal relationship. Moreover, transitive objects of knowledge (theories, models, et cetera) are socially produced, that is, they stem from a certain kind of practice. In this sense, 'theory production' is necessary for scientific endeavour.

But because of the dominance of positivism in the debated disciplines, the term 'theory production' is used to describe the development of models that must necessarily include capabilities to predict. This turn toward a positive understanding of theory, I criticise in line with Flyvbjerg. As we have learned, prediction is impossible in open systems. Society is an open system, and as such the requirement of predictive theories (the positivsts' conception of theory) is misleading. We need theory not the way it is understood by positivists, but as a concept to refer to everything abstract or imperceivable. Otherwise, scientific progress would be impossible because we would ignore that transitive objects of knowledge are necessary to produce new knowledge.

Likewise, Flyvbjerg proclaims that academics should shift their focus from *discourse* toward practice. However, especially in geopolitics there are voices which advocate for discourse to become the centre of discussions (for example Tuathail 1996; cf. Müller 2008). I consider both practice *and* discourse as important elements of social and spatial development. What we think and talk about is what we are, as is what we practice and vice versa. This argument is also represented in Bhaskar's transformational model

of social activity, where society consciously produces and unconsciously reproduced the conditions of their making. Certainly, we can speak of 'practising discourse,' thus Flyvbjerg's argument becomes a dead end (see also Müller 2008; Thrift 2000). Because 'to discourse' is a practice by and of itself it may not be neglected in social inquiries. Discourse and practice are in a reciprocal relationship too.

Speaking of discourse, Flyvbjerg himself argues to pursue dialogue with a polyphony of voices. Let us shortly scrutinise this guideline. Dialogue depends on third parties. Thus, for successful phronetic inquiry, researchers become dependent on third parties. If nobody responds, the research they pursue will loose relevance. Flyvbjerg (2004b, 294) says that 'focus on relations of values of power [...] typically creates interest in the research by parties outside the research community.' From my point of view, this does not need to be the case necessarily because creating interest is only possible if people understand the inherent connection between present social practices and its influence on society. This connection is also present in Bhaskar's transformational model of social activity; and, as we will see below, of essential concern when developing emancipatory research.

The question remains whether pursuing dialogue is always possible – especially when the phronetic researchers is part of the power relations that they address. I suppose that dominant actors in a particular case under study practise their power efficiently and successfully (as do in turn the dominated, to make the picture complete). They adapt to particular rules and ascertain specific behaviour which is beneficial under the circumstances that surround their practices. How is a researcher, as an, at least at the beginning, external participant and actor within these relations able to challenge them? How can researchers make themselves heard? For sure, there needs to be gained a lot of knowledge, power must be practised permanently, and many efforts must be taken to eventually dispute the status quo. An example is one concern raised by Flyvbjerg (2013), criticising the press support of the American Planning Association for submitters of articles. The discourse regards the submission of an article (Flyvbjerg, Holm and Buhl 2002) which was accompanied by controversial behaviour by the association. This behaviour is exposed but found response by Bolan (2015) only recently – the response took *thirteen* years (see also Flyvbjerg 2015). Challenging the status quo is difficult.

We have discussed some of the more general concerns, now let us turn to the most crucial flaw: the lack of spatiality. The 'spatial turn' is generally regarded as an important movement within the social sciences (Warf and Arias 2009; concerning geography see

also Lossau and Lippuner 2004; concerning international relations see also Iqbal and Starr 2015). Certainly, if we want to introduce phronetics to geographico-political disciplines, we must develop a way to include spatiality. At the current stage, the opposite is the case: While Flyvbjerg's original contribution was written for the general social scientist ([2001] 2011), later texts address and adapt the phronetic approach for particular sub-disciplines within the social sciences (Flyvbjerg 2004b; see also Landman 2012). Even though also adapted for a journal concerned with spatial planning, phronetics misses any thought that contributes an explanation of its standpoint toward space.

Even recent work (Flyvbjerg, Landman and Schram 2012c) lacks an account of spatiality. While the collection includes one article (see Basu 2012) that makes spatiality within phronetics subject of discussion , Soja (2013) considers this contribution not sufficient. According to him, the lack of spatiality in phronetic social science is compelling because Foucault's concept of power incorporates space as an important factor (see for example Foucault 2004). Soja argues that Foucault's commonly known concept of 'knowledge/power' is actually a triad of power, knowledge, and space (see also Crampton and Elden 2007). Thus Soja demands that 'phronesis from the start needs to be seen as simultaneously social, historical, *and spatial*' (Soja 2013, 753). He adds that 'one of the most significant unexplored fields of phronetic social science […] [is its application] to urban spatial causality and the generative effects of urban agglomeration' (755). Concentrating on 'inequality, hierarchy, and injustice', according to Soja, is 'a key step in the spatialization of phronetic social science' and an important cornerstone for the future development of phronetic inquiry. In light of this criticism it is striking that the lack of spatiality was admitted as shortcoming by Flyvbjerg, Landman and Schram (2013).

3.4 On theory and practice

In light of what we discussed in the previous chapters, phronetic social science is a highly normative approach that objects to naturalism and reductionism. Phronetics shares this objection with critical realism. But, on the contrary to critical realism, phronetics misses a conceptualisation of an underlying ontology to justify such claims. While Bhaskar focuses on a theory to conceptualise how the world must be like, Flyvbjerg concentrates on the development of a praxis for researchers to deal with this world. He

is more concerned with methodology. In other words, Bhaskar assembles the theoretical framework under which normative research such as Flyvbjerg's can be conducted, and Flyvbjerg, without considering ontological presumptions, provides a sophisticated guide on how to do so in praxis.

We can clearly see notions of the realist philosophy in Flyvbjerg's arguments. Some of them we already discussed in course of criticising phronetic's pillars. Now, let us take a closer look on the following questions about power relations that I selected from the quotation already cited above to make the connection even more evident (Flyvbjerg [2001] 2011, 123):

> How has the active exercise of power […] affected the possibilities for the further exercise of power, with the resulting reinforcement of certain power relations and the attenuation of others? […] How have these relations made certain rationalities possible and others impossible […]? How can games of power be played differently?

For these questions to make sense, Flyvbjerg must presuppose that social forms (such as individuals or organisations) can be held responsible for their actions. He presupposes that they affect others. Most importantly, the last question implies that social forms obtain freedom to influence other social forms. The argument builds upon Collier's concept of stratified freedom. These aspects show that Flyvbjerg's argumentation is realist, at least to some extent. We can literally see that positions, practices, and relations are essential to his thinking – as they are in critical realism. The power relations Flyvbjerg addresses with phronetics, make social forms consciously produce and/or unconsciously reproduce the conditions of their making, as Bhaskar argues.

Even though I consider it a coincidence that the follow-up publication of *Making Social Science Matter* is called '*Real* Social Science' (Flyvbjerg, Landman and Schram 2012c, emphasis by me), there is indeed some essence behind the adjective. Based on arguments that stem from practice solely, Flyvbjerg develops ideas on how to disclose what lies beyond the *empirical*. Albeit the lack of clear ontological arguments, the approach propagated by him is to some extent a guide on how to pursue critical realism in the social sciences.

Only 'to some extent' because some aspects such as Flyvbjerg's difficulty to conceptualise 'context' or to argue for normativity remain superficial. An argumentation that solely stems from praxis cannot spur an encompassing research approach. We need the abstract, the theoretical to enhance our endeavours in scientific research. Here, it is striking that none of the publications concerning phronetics refers to works by neither

Bhaskar, Collier or Sayer though these could support phronetic research by means of philosophy. For example, the concept of false believes and stratified freedom can justify that phronetics includes a normative momentum. To mention another example, the transformational model of social activity can support phronetic researchers to conceptualise context. Misguided positions, practices and relations Flyvbjerg and his followers tackle by conceptualising 'tension points.' Moreover, as we will see in the next chapter, stratification can help to move beyond the structure/agency dichotomy. Thus, critical realism can strengthen phronetic social science.

Hence, on the contrary to Flyvbjerg, I urge to consider both practice and theory. They are a beneficial interplay rather than a mutual threat. Critical realism can free phronetic social science from being criticised as unscientific and arbitrary because of its normative momentum. If false believes can spur misguided positions, practices, and relations, it will be unwise to let them perpetuate. Conversely, misguided positions, practices, and relations – or 'tension points' as conceptualised in phronetics – can be disclosed by means of the cornerstones Flyvbjerg developed for his approach. The pillars that Flyvbjerg developed and critical realism are mutually beneficial.

In this chapter we encountered an influential critical and emancipatory tradition: phronetic social science. Its founder Bent Flyvbjerg re-claims the interplay of *episteme*, *techne*, and *phronesis*, and combines it with a Foucauldian concept of power to object to prevalent practices within the social sciences. The resulting research approach consists of three pillars that provide key questions, guidelines, and the concept of 'tension points' to challenge misguided actions.

While we raised methodological concerns, we saw that the approach shares similarities with critical realism. To mention the most important: first, both incorporate a self-critical momentum; second, Flyvbjerg emphasises the socio-historical context as Bhaskar does by means of the transformational model of social activity; and third, Flyvbjerg's focus on the practice of power is reflected in Bhaskar's focus on positions, practices, and relations. Moreover, we argued that the ontological guidelines raised by phronetics can benefit from critical realist's philosophical ontology. Hence, it stands to reason that the two approaches are mutually supporting grounds.

In search for a critical and emancipatory approach for political geography, the decisive weakness of phronetics is the lack of spatiality. Nevertheless, its ideas can be of guidance for developing a methodology based on critical realism since their key

tenets go hand in hand. Not to mention, that the approach has the potential to deal with spatial inequalities. The potential simply has not been put to use yet.

Thus, in the next chapter we will focus on the fusion of the philosophy and the methodology while incorporating a suitable account on spatiality.

Chapter 4

Getting spatial: transcendental phronetic political geography

We saw, critical realism and phronetic social science can help to free inquiries in the social sciences from being criticised as unscientific and arbitrary but both lack explicit considerations of spatiality. For geographico-political disciplines, this calls to search for a tradition that shares their ideas but incorporates spatial thinking. We will summarise these notions in the first section of this chapter.

In the second section, we will encounter Yves Lacoste who demands academics to develop a necessarily spatial and responsible understanding of social life. He has theorised about a 'systemic analysis' that helps to engage in phenomena that perpetuate over multiple scales. As we will see, his conceptualisation of *géopolitiques* is original and distinct, thus a simple translation to its Anglophone counter-part 'geopolitics' cannot meet it. His ideas fortify the relevance of geography as not only a scientific discipline among many others but a socially and politically relevant endeavour for every citizen. These ideas are propagated in the journal *Hérodote* that was founded by him. Lacoste and his followers press for political and emancipatory debates within geography. Because for him 'everything is geopolitical,' (Mamadouh 1998, 239) spatiality becomes a key factor for research in the social sciences.

After considering his accounts, we will synthesise what we have discussed in the previous chapters in a new research programme called 'transcendental phronetic political geography.' It is a combination of ideas of critical realism, phronetic social science, and Lacoste's Hérodotian school that provides certain advantages over traditional approaches. Choosing critical realism as philosophical foundation allows us to use both typically positivist and typically interpretivist strategies to pursue research. Coupled with stratification we are not restricted to analyse phenomena from within a single

scale, but demanded to zoom in and out while pursuing research. In this context, phronetic social science gives advice on what to pay attention to for producing practical research outcomes. We will reconsider its four power questions, adapting them to spur transcendental arguments, and re-discover false believes as tension points. Lacoste's approach shows how the proposed inquiries can be made spatial. To make this clear we will read his systemic approach through the eyes of transcendental realists and connect it to the concept of the world being stratified. This will be accompanied by arguing for the importance of geographico-political education in virtue of Lacoste's demands.

In the last section of this chapter, we will locate the new research programme within prevalent traditions that investigate the geographico-political and define its advantages. By doing so we will clarify its scope and what to expect from it. The research programme is shaped for challenging dominant practices in the geographico-political world that perpetuate over different scales, with multiple types of actors involved. Its focus lies on providing research outcomes that have impact on related processes in question. The programme engages with the social production of transitive objects of knowledge. Thus, it makes political geography an *intrinsic* element of social practice.

4.1 Setting the stage for a new research programme

Before arguing for the novel research programme proposed, let us summarise and contextualise what we have learned in the previous chapters. In the first chapter we discussed the philosophy of (social) science in general. We categorised key debates of it about naturalism, reductionism, and normativity. A naturalist pursuit of social science imposes the ontology and/or epistemology of the natural sciences on the social sciences. Ontological naturalism equalises objects of study of the natural sciences and objects of study of the social sciences; in pursuit of epistemological naturalism, scientists impose a very similar (if not the same) modus operandi of the natural sciences on the social sciences. In connection to naturalism we encountered reductionism and learned that scholars tend to reduce the social sciences to the natural sciences ontologically, epistemologically, and/or theoretically. While doing so, social inquiries (and what they study) loose their stance as distinct and equally important endeavours. We then objected to naturalism and reductionism in light of general concerns in the philosophy of social science – and added further concerns through what we have learned about both critical realism and phronetic social science in the subsequent chapters.

Further, we reconsidered the fact/value dichotomy. We concluded that scientific inquiries cannot be value-free and any science incorporates normative notions, especially the social sciences. Thus, we could argue that social sciences do not need to exclude normative accounts per se. Explanatory critiques, as conceptualised by critical realism, and phronesis, as underlined by phronetic social science, demand critical approaches and make social emancipation possible. Concurrently, both critical realism and phronetic social science disallow arbitrary advices and demand scientific pursuits of a particular kind to facilitate research.

Let us revise how this is possible. The core of critical realism, that is transcendental realism, permits critical and emancipatory research by developing a distinct *philosophical* ontology (cf. *scientific* ontologies/epistemologies). By use of transcendental arguments, Bhaskar can distinguish between intransitive and transitive knowledge, three different domains (*real*, *actual*, and *empirical*), and conceptualises the world as stratified. Taking up these ideas, Collier argues that, in a stratified world, strata can be in relations of composition and emergence, which allows both analytic and holistic approaches. By appreciating stratified freedom, he reasons that we are responsible for both our successes and our failures. Traditional philosophies, on the contrary, failed to develop a distinct philosophical ontology. They suffer from so-called 'epistemic fallacy,' that is, they impose their epistemological concerns on ontology, and incite the aforementioned problems in regard to naturalism, reductionism, and normativity.

Like proponents of critical realism, Flyvbjerg objects to traditional scientific endeavours by means of phronetic social science. Advancing ideas of Aristotle and Foucault, his concept of phronetic inquiries intends to make social science matter again. That is, he instructs social scientists to increase practical and socially relevant outcomes of their endeavours. He demands that scientists focus on power relations while accepting particular guidelines (of ontological, epistemological, and ethical type). These guidelines shall help to answer four questions that frame every phronetic inquiry. In the end, according to Flyvbjerg, phronetic scientists can illuminate tension points and provide a base for challenging prevalent but questionable habits within society.

Disciplines that are concerned about everything geographico-political (such as political geography, geopolitics, and international relations) meet both the traditional ideas and the more recent streams presented here diversely. While they all try to comprehend the relationship between society and space, the complexity of the object under study has been spurring multiple disciplines, sub-disciplines, and methodologies

each trying to address particular concerns in question. For example, we mentioned the dilemma of defending approaches by means of philosophical foundations, and thus the incitement of inconclusive debates in regard to international relations.

While a debate about critical realism spurred within international relations only recently, it has a much longer tradition in geography. Nevertheless, critical realism is misunderstood in both fields. In international relations the variety of 'realisms' makes a distinction difficult; the contributions to *Millennium* adding further intricacy. On the contrary, in geography researchers welcomed critical realism as criticism toward the behaviourist movements in the second half of last century. As we saw, geographers have been appreciating the versatility of critical realism, and started to form their own understanding of a critical realist geography. This development is highly criticised by Mäki and Oinas (2004) because the core of critical realism was not only formed but *de*-formed to 'GeoRealism,' a type of realism that comes with multiple drawbacks. GeoRealism cannot keep up with CoreRealism. This makes reconsidering the core of realism (as is done in the text at hand) for the discipline of geography even more urgent.

While we appreciated the 'false promise of philosophical foundations' (Monteiro and Ruby 2009), we can see that critical realism is a different kind of foundation. Since it develops a distinct philosophical ontology, it must be considered rather an add-on than a competitor to the traditional foundations. Its philosophical arguments are encompassing in the sense that it allows for research that stems from both classical empiricism and transcendental idealism (while objecting to 'anything goes approaches'). It is an umbrella term, and actually marks the first time that a distinct *philsophy of* science was developed – the other approaches are mere *philosophies for* science. In traditional accounts, science becomes an epiphenomenon of nature, or it imposes its epistemology on ontological grounds.[1]

What is the stance of phronetic social science? On the one hand, it had great influence on political science and has been a driving force for the Perestroika movement. On the other hand, the approach lacks spatiality, which is a crucial shortcoming. We saw that, while there is only a single contribution applying phronesis to spatial research in their practical guide to phronesis, Flyvbjerg and his followers can do nothing more

1. Important sidenote: This is not to claim that the proposed approach is better than others. This is to claim that critical realism has advantages over other philosophical foundations. Even research that is conducted in virtue of critical realism can – partially – have the form of research that stems from the other foundations. The crucial difference is that critical realist research for example, is open to both holistic and analytical approaches, or supports mixed-method research.

than admitting this decisive flaw.

Both critical realism and phronetic social science emphasise that social inquiries must include a socio-relational and tempo-relational momentum, but they fail to consider space. Thus, they lack an essential ingredient for being applied to disciplines concerned with geographico-political phenomena. But this should not prevent us from taking their ideas into account because emancipatory approaches of similar kind show that it is possible to incorporate a spatial momentum too. Thus, we should not give up what we were taught by critical realism and phronetic social science but try to consolidate what we have learned with what an approach that incorporates a spatial momentum can teach us.

The approach I have in mind is the conceptualisation of *géopolitiques* by Yves Lacoste. As we will see in the next section, his research has been neglected by the Anglophone school of political geography though it is a unique and enlightening tradition for the discipline. While it lacks an ontological and epistemological base to serve as a complete research programme, its emancipatory notions and Lacoste's idea of a 'systemic analysis' will help us to conflate critical realism and phronetic social science to a new research programme.

4.2 Finding spatiality: Lacoste's *géopolitiques*

Yves Lacoste's approach toward *géopolitiques* is an example for a nationally, and regionally influential school of geography in Europe. Its leading journal *Hérodote* is, next to independent publications of Lacoste and his followers, *the* main resource for geographico-political thinking in France. The domestic success notwithstanding, it is echoed outside of his main audience only scarcely. The school is overlooked by Anglophone, European, and scholars around the world. This is even more surprising since the French culture of geography has contributed to the revival of 'geopolitics' essentially, and *Hérodote* celebrates its 40th anniversary this year.

In Lacoste's concept of *géopolitiques* 'everything is geopolitical' (Mamadouh 1998). Originating from a tradition of Geography as propagated by Vidal de la Blache, Lacoste proposed a new interpretation of geography's purpose that opposes to quantitative and theoretical turns within geography in the 1970s. The title of his famous proclamation *La géographie, ça sert, d'abord, à faire la guerre* ('Geography mainly exists for the sake of making war') defends the relationship between geographical and political thinking,

thus emphasises the socio-political momentum of geography (Lacoste [1976] 2014). We can see his pamphlet as an indirect attempt to popularise 'geopolitics' (the conjunction of geographical and political research and thought) once again. These ideas find support by the vast contributions in the journal *Hérodote*.

In fact, Lacoste had stressed the possibility of a critical discipline that contests geopolitical ideologies long before Tuathail (1996) did with his idea of 'critical geopolitics' that is known to mark the post-structuralist extreme of geographico-political thinking in the Anglophone world (Kofroň 2012). By using the plural form *géopolitiques*, the Hérodotian school underlines the variety of subjective perceptions and standpoints on everything that is geographico-political (see Claval 2000; Mamadouh 1998; see also Giblin 2012). In this context the school emphasises that the purpose of geography is to serve society and emancipate it from ideologies established by those in control (Lacoste 1984). Hence, Lacoste pioneered in the critical sub-field of political geography long before anybody did in the Anglophone world.

This makes it even more surprising that the tradition has been overlooked. In regard to English-speaking academia, Hepple (2000) argues that the neglect stems from a mutual lack of interest: neither Anglophone scholars are interested in the French tradition nor are Lacoste and his followers interested in Anglophone schools (see also Fall 2008; Ehlers 2004; Harris 2001). Similarly, Claval (2000, 243) juxtaposes the traditions concerning their perception on the importance of theory. As we will see, Lacoste and his followers have been neglecting theoretical debates although the Anglophone world of geography deems theory an important factor.

In regard to European academia, scholars in proximity neither mention Lacoste's work in overviews of geopolitical thinking (Kofroň 2012; Reuber 2012) nor in analyses of geopolitical codes of foreign countries (Laš and Baar 2014). The adapted version of Hérodote in Italy is an exception to prove the rule (Claval 2000, 261-2). Rather, the neglect resembles the overall pattern that the audience of European journals of geography is nationally (at best regionally) restricted (Bajerski 2011; Bajerski and Siwek 2012). Because of this, European scholars of geography focus on publishing in Anglophone journals (Aalbers and Rossi 2007; Paasi 2013). As a result, although we are familiar with the work of French academics of the same generation, for example Michel Foucault's, the endeavours of Yves Lacoste are (at best) often only mentioned, instead of critically assessed or acknowledged.

The more important it is to urge reading the French tradition as an insightful con-

tribution for understanding everything geographico-political. Since Lacoste considers himself a geographer focusing on *géopolitiques* (see Lacoste 2012, 26), in his argumentation he departs from geography and lets the discipline incorporate notions of political science. As we have discussed in light of the contributions by for example Criekemans (2009) and Lossau (2002) before, it is difficult and inconclusive to demarcate between political geography, geopolitics, and international relations. Thus, in the course of the text, we have spoken of 'everything geographico-political' to clarify that we are generally concerned about disciplines that deal with the interrelation of politics and geography. In like manner, we must conceive what Lacoste proposes for geography to be relevant for the Anglophone concepts of political geography, geopolitics, and international relations. Since the concept of *géopolitiques* is distinct from what we understand as 'geopolitics' in the Anglophone discourse, it is an insightful contribution.

4.2.1 Strengths and weaknesses of an emancipatory school

Lacoste's understanding of a geographico-political endeavour is epitomised in the following sentence that I freely interpreted from one of his contributions:

> The reason for geographers' existence is to understand and articulate the complexity of space with its intermingled different processes that have unequal dimensions on the planetary and local scale.[2]

It tells us two important aspects: one related to *researchers* that investigate geographico-political processes, and one about *the object under study* itself. Let us consider and contextualise one after the other.

Researchers that deal with geographico-political processes, according to Lacoste, must be active and they possess responsibility toward society. They must 'understand and articulate' what they investigate. To understand this concern, let us take a closer look on how the French school evolved.

From the very beginning of his career as geographer, Lacoste has been focusing on the way meta-narratives were formed within the greater scope of geopolitical thinking (Claval 2000; Hepple 2000). This intention was triggered by the French intelligentsia who was dissatisfied that the events of the 1960s had failed to affect the political regime. Instead of politicisation, meta-theoretical debates within the field of geography caused

2. 'La raison d'être des géographes est de savoir penser l'espace dans sa complexité, en tant qu'enchevêtrements et interactions très diverses et qui de surcroît ont des dimensions très inégales, depuis celles d'envergure planétaire jusqu'à celles de certains éléments ponctuels significatifs dans une situation locale.' (Lacoste 1984, 19)

its quantification and theorisation. Subsequently, Lacoste and his followers focused on the prevailing narratives within the discipline. They proclaimed that there have had always existed two geographies since the beginning of the 20th century: one pursued by the military and decision makers, and one addressed by academic scholars. Lacoste considered the behaviourist developments of the 1960s and 1970s incapable of engaging with this dilemma, whilst a discourse concerning the political dimension of geography had remained due.

Because of this he proclaimed geography to be critical. Otherwise scientists would misunderstand it – we have already discussed the history of 'geopolitics' and its atrocious consequences at the beginning of last century. Thus, the Hérodotian tradition has been supporting a critical momentum within the discipline and considered different understandings of *géopolitiques* from the beginning. To achieve this, the journal is, next to traditional journal subscriptions, also available in regular book stores (Claval 2000; Hepple 2000). This fact, that is, the wish to ease access to geographico-political thought, also underlines that Lacoste feels responsible for *stimulating* geographico-political discourse. While he and his followers try to understand the object under study, they also feel responsible to articulate what they have learned by publishing their knowledge not only for scientists but the broader public. Thus, the French tradition is characterised by both a critical and emancipatory moment. Not to mention that the aforementioned responsibility demands socially relevant research outcomes. An aspect we already encountered in phronetic social science (see especially Schram, Flyvbjerg and Landman 2013).

Once the theoretical proclaim of a critical discipline was fully accomplished, the Hérodotian school has been focusing on its application solely. Although the school roots in a critique of the epistemological developments of Geography of the 1970s, meta-theoretical arguments are downplayed today. The school desists from reflecting their own assumptions critically because Lacoste and his followers consider their theoretical arguments already achieved. According to them, now their only task is to apply what they have accomplished during the early beginnings of *Hérodote*. The lack of both meta-theoretical and theoretical debates limits the potential of the tradition because 'the elevation of the concrete, complex, specific and particular [...] has the corollary of largely dismissing the abstract, general, ordered and theorized conceptions and analyses' (Hepple 2000, 287; see also Claval 2000) – an argument we also made in the previous chapter. In combination with its rich ontology, the critical and emancipatory

character, and the resulting normative moment, the lack of (meta-)theoretical arguments makes the French school appear like an 'anything goes approach.' Since theory plays an important role in the Anglophone tradition, the neglect seems less surprising.

4.2.2 Systemic analyses contextualised

Let us now turn to the second aspect of the quotation that addresses the complexity of the object under study. As we have already discussed in previous sections in regard to Varzi (2001) and Smith (2001), geography is rich in ontology because it deals with a variety of physical and social objects. Lacoste addresses this 'complexity of space' by considering everything geopolitical. For him everything consists of its geography (its physics) and political actors (the society) who form their environment as far as they can (cf. what we discussed in regard to Kristof 1960). In this context, he considers 'the (nation-)state as sandwiched between external, supranational and global forces and internal, regionalist/localist forces of fragmentation' (Hepple 2000, 287), which underlines the importance of other political actors despite states on different scales.

By doing so, Lacoste engages with a recurring term in political geography: scale. Mamadouh et al. argue that the interplay between local and global phenomena must be recognised (Mamadouh, Kramsch and van der Velde 2004, 457; see also Elden 2013):

> If scale is a matter of *relation*, the accent lies on the mutually constitutive character of scales. No scales exist without the others. No analysis can be limited to one scale: scales are constructed in relation to each other. The material and discursive production and reproduction of different scales are mutually constitutive and need to be analysed to understand scales as a process. […] Extra-local relations define the local. The global is part of the local as much as the local is part of the global, a statement that is off if one thinks of scale as size or level, in which the global and the local are either distinct levels or nested in a specific order […] What is important is to understand the coexistence of multiple scales. […] While geographers dealing with scale generally underline the relational character of scale, the unproblematic uses of scale as a pre-given, natural category remain predominant in the rest of the social sciences.

Scale is a complex concept which should enjoy much more sophisticated discussions (see for example Claval 2006; Dahlman 2009; Dijkink and Mamadouh 2006; Fainstein 1999; Howitt 2003). In light of this, Brenner argues (Brenner 2001, 605-6; see also Brenner 2014c):

> Scale […] cannot be construed adequately as a system of territorial containers defined by absolute geographic size (a 'Russian dolls' model of scales). Each geographical scale is constituted through its historically evolving positionality within a larger relational grid of vertically 'stretched' and horizontally 'dispersed' sociospatial processes, relations and interdependencies. Consequently, the very intelligibility of each scalar articulation of a

> social process hinges crucially upon its embeddedness within dense webs of relations to other scales and spaces.

This leads us to the overall conclusion that we need research methodologies that are capable of incorporating multiple scales at the same time. An example of such methodologies is Lacoste's 'analyse systemique' (Lacoste 1984, 22-3). It maintains a connection to geographical prerequisites through 'geographical reasoning' (Giblin 2012; Hepple 2000; Lacoste 1982a) and engages with the 'sandwichdness' of states between local, supranational, and global forces. Systemic analysis means, on the one hand, to analyse events on a particular scale, and, on the other hand, to disclose how these events are related to other scales (see Figure 4.1). The idea behind this is that geographico-political processes that appear to be the same must be re-contextualised on different scales while appreciating that each of them can influences others by transcending through multiple scales (Lacoste [1976] 2014, 237 sqq.; cf. Dussouy 2010).

Unknowingly Lacoste applies in geographical-political endeavours what Roy Bhaskar and Bent Flyvbjerg philosophise about in regard to research in the social sciences in general! Let me explain why.

By analysing events on a particular scale and disclosing how these events are related to other scales, Lacoste acknowledges Bhaskar's claim that the world is stratified, and pursues – in the words of Andrew Collier – horizontal and vertical explanation. Obviously, since his school lacks a sound philosophical understanding, he fails to realise that the connection between the events he investigates and the underlying mechanisms he wants to disclose is much more complex. Nonetheless, systemic analyses can disclose how events are triggered through others on the same stratum, and how events of one stratum can explain events of another stratum. Scales (in spatial terms) represent different strata (in transcendental realist terms). The conceptualisation of strata being in relations of composition and emergence can give justice to both the claims of the quotations above and the systemic approach as developed by Lacoste.

In this context it is important to paraphrase a remark about political philosophy made by Collier (1994, 200-4). In this remark, he argues that the practice of designating *sovereignty* to particular entities in conceptualisations of the world is misleading. For him, 'the illusion of sovereignty as an absolute is a pernicious one' because it makes society try to reify it through supporting institutional structures instead of appreciating 'genuinely multi-levelled democratic structures, with real powers located at each level, adequate to deal with the problems of that level' (203). By claiming that particular

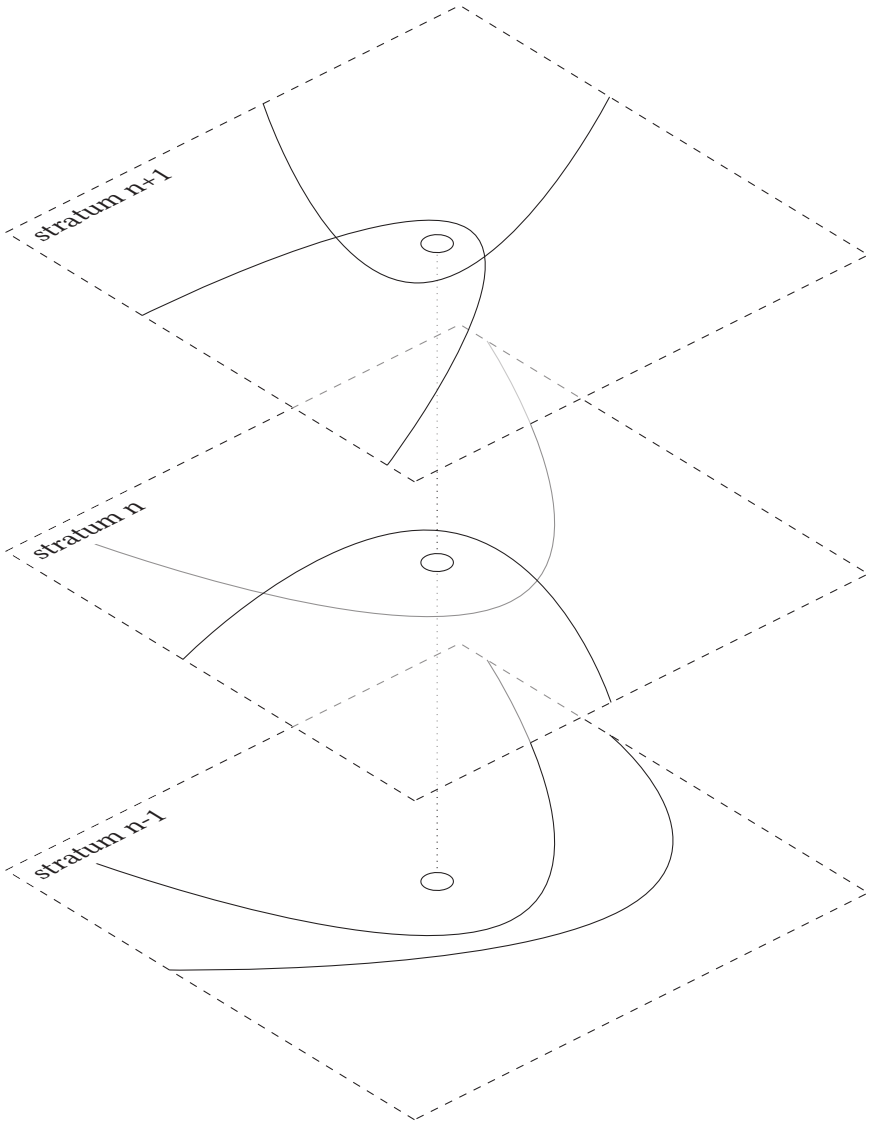

Figure 4.1: Systemic analysis as pursued in transcendental phronetic political geography (adapted from Lacoste [1976] 2014, 237 sqq.). The investigated geographico-political phenomenon ◯ is part of different structures on multiple strata/scales. Because strata/scales are in relations of composition and/or emergence, the structures can perpetuate on multiple strata/scales or only appear on a specific stratum/scale. Thus, depending on the stratum/scale under investigation, the phenomenon can be torn toward different or the same directions. The positions, practices, and relations within and between both surrounding structures and the phenomeon itself must be scrutinised to disclose false believes about them.

administrative levels are sovereign, and others subordinated, we refuse to see the complexity of reality that stems from the stratification of the world. On the contrary, transcendental realism can give a full account of 'scale.'

Like transcendental realism, Lacoste desists from prioritising particular levels; unknowingly, he appreciates the stratification of the world and provides means to investigate some of its higher strata through systemic analyses.

Not only does Lacoste apply critical realist notions, he also implements fundamental ideas of Bent Flyvbjerg. Flyvbjerg also criticises that prevalent research methodologies cannot fulfil the complex connection between different scales. Let us in this context recall a quotation (Flyvbjerg 2004b, 300):

> Researchers generally tend to generate either macro-level or micro-level explanations, ignoring the critical connections. Empirical work follows the same pattern. Instead of research that attempts to link macro-level factors and actors' choices in a specific phenomenon, scholars tend to dichotomize. Structural analyses and studies of actors each receive their share of attention, but in separate projects, by separate researchers.

In light of the critical and emancipatory momentum of both phronetic social science and Lacoste's approach, we further see that the French tradition of geography has been providing research examples that are in virtue of Flyvbjerg's claims. The work by Lacoste and his followers is research that shares phronetic accounts, but neither Flyvbjerg nor Lacoste refer to each other.

While we cannot assess every systemic analysis that Lacoste and his followers have pursued thus far (because such an attempt would go beyond the scope of the thesis), we can at least mention prominent examples and related debates. An example are accounts on the roots and stimulations of national, supranational, and global forces on cities. Lacoste himself has worked on these from the very beginning of his career (for example in Lacoste 1982b, 1986); related debates (independently from the French school) are numerous attempts to contextualise the geopolitical situation of Jerusalem (see Jabareen 2010; Pullan et al. 2007; Yacobi and Pullan 2014) and divided cities in general (see Pullan et al. 2010). Recently, Fregonese (2012) outlined the development of so-called 'urban geopolitics' within the Anglophone sphere of political geography. Further examples are the contributions by Fainstein (2014) and Brenner (2014a). But in comparison to the French school, the Anglophone contributions are very young.

Research of such type is in vogue. Thus, conceptualising suitable philosophical and methodological guidelines for research that tries to understand the geographico-political relationship over multiple scales falls on fertile ground. Dittmer (2014) who

argued for the fusion of the concept of assemblage and complexity theory recently, is an example that tries to deal with these concerns meta-theoretically (see also Squire 2015; Steinberg and Peters 2015).

While all of the aforementioned contributions attempt to raise the concern that geopolitics, a discipline concerned with the relationship of power and space, must look beyond the international scale, they fail to provide an encompassing account on how to justify such an approach philosophically and cannot contextualise such an approach in light of the debates concerned with naturalism, reductionism, and normativity. On the contrary, the research programme I propose can address these aspects: Critical Realism 'allows for the coexistence of holistic and analytical approaches' (Collier 1994, 118); phronetic social science provides both arguments for socially relevant research that may include normative notions and guidelines on how to pursue such research; and Lacoste's systemic analyses show that such an attempt is applicable and demonstrates how it can be translated for spatial disciplines.

Hence, in recent decades the three contributions presented have attempted to shake the grounds of our traditional perceptions on how to understand the philosophy of science, how to pursue research within the social sciences, and what the purpose of political geography is – while pointing toward a similar direction. But all remain neglected in political geography. As we saw, in the first instance the proposed philosophy has been de-formed to a futile tool, in the second instance the proposed modus operandi lacks spatiality, and in the third instance the propositions have been overlooked. As we will see in the next section, the drawbacks of each of these contributions prevail because nobody has made the effort to combine them yet. By combining the aforementioned ideas, we can create a new perspective on how to investigate geographico-political phenomena.

4.3 Developing transcendental phronetic political geography

Critical realism, phronetic social science, and the Hérodotian approach are united by their purpose to provide knowledge that challenges prevalent ideas, conceptions, and/or understandings of phenomena in question. By doing so, all of them consider that it is possible to change the prevalent geographico-political situations. Critical realism questions the philosophy of social science and provides a distinct philosophical ontology that allows critical and emancipatory research. Phronetic social science

questions the modus operandi in the social science and develops cornerstones for enhanced social inquiries that aim at the emancipation of society and the improvement of the prevalent situation. Lacoste's *géopolitiques* is an insightful approach developed within political geography. It delivers a method to deal with spatial contexts that overcomes prevalent conceptions of the discipline's scope while including a critical and emancipatory momentum.

In search for a way to investigate, question, and improve the living conditions of the left-behind that are manifested in informal urban settlements, fusing the ideas behind the three approaches looks promising. Together they provide a philosophical foundation, epistemological guidance, and a method especially developed for spatial contexts. This section takes and adapts the three approaches for a fusion I call 'transcendental phronetic political geography.' By means of transcendental realism we justify phronetic inquiries within geography that take the inherent connection between political processes and physical space into account. The proposed research programme happens around four key concepts – power, space, scale, and justice – whose connection to the three approaches will be discussed in the next sub-section. After this discussion, we will organise particular research questions and guidelines based on the three approaches. Once we reconsidered the cornerstones of the fusion, in the subsequent section we will discuss for which type of inquiries the approach can be used.

4.3.1 On power, space, scale, and justice

The research programme that I propose addresses four key concepts of political geography in particular: power, space, scale, and justice. On the one hand, each pillar of the approach addresses these concepts in its own way; on the other hand, we can find similarities in the attitude that they develop toward the concepts.

Power is of special concern in both critical realism and phronetic social science. Flyvbjerg's conceptualisation of power, which is deeply connected to the one by Foucault, sees power immanent in every practice and relation. Power does not point toward one but multiple directions. The dominant and the dominated are in a relation of power. Power is not limited to individuals but inherent in every type of relation. In light of what we learned about transcendental realism, it seems to me that Flyvbjerg is on the right track to understand how to relate structures in the world, but (as others) has not been able to differentiate the *real* from the *empirical* (and the *actual*) yet. While considering transcendental realism, we saw that 'power' does not quite resemble how underlying mechanisms of the real operate. Bhaskar argues that, rather than speaking of causal

powers, we must speak of *tendencies* when we conceptualise relations. Things *tend* to behave a certain way. So, instead of a static conceptualisation of the relation between structures, we must provide a more dynamic conceptualisation. While Flyvbjerg has a fixed conception of power relations, dynamism becomes visible in Collier's argument for stratified freedom that allows for relations to change because structures reconsider their practices.

On the contrary to power, space is neither addressed by critical realism nor phronetic social science. In the transformational model of social activity, Bhaskar mainly addresses time by considering scientific progress and the production and reproduction of society in history. Phronetic social science lacks spatiality entirely. On the contrary, space, and especially the connection between space and society, is central to the works by Yves Lacoste. In his account, everything becomes geopolitical, as Mamadouh put it. His systemic analyses can help to acquire a better understanding of geographico-political relations that often perpetuate on multiple scales.

As we saw, stratification can explain our conception of different scales. When strata emerge from others, we can perceive them as scales: from the individual human being, to smaller groups, nations, states, supranational entities, international organisations, and the international system as a whole. Since different strata are in relation of emergence and/or composition, scales are in relation too; thus, stratification can do justice to the concerns about scales mentioned above. Hence, it is important to move beyond agency and structure, as Flyvbjerg argues; and investigate the relations of different scales/strata, as epitomised by Lacoste's systemic analyses and conceptualised by Collier through *vertical explanation*.

Since each of the three approaches aims at critical and emancipatory research, they are related to the concept of justice. In general, the idea is to generate research outcomes that help to develop truth claims. In turn, these claims counter betrayal and false accounts on geographico-political phenomena. These ideas are reflected in the critical realist conceptions of false believes and explanatory critiques; Flyvbjerg's argument to incorporate phronesis into contemporary research; and Lacoste's demand for socially responsible geographers.

4.3.2 Research questions and guidelines as leitmotiv

For phronetic social science, Flyvbjerg has developed four key questions that frame every type of phronetic inquiry: Where are we going with a specific problematic?

Who gains and who losses, and by which mechanisms of power? Is this development desirable? What, if anything, should we do about it?

In the previous chapter, we have already discussed these questions and concluded that they come with certain deficiencies. Especially the third and fourth questions seem to encourage subjective and highly normative understandings of research that we considered dangerous. While a normative momentum within sciences is possible, this does not imply that every attitude toward a problematic in question is valid. These concerns notwithstanding, since questions of this form provide a good way of framing future research of the kind that is proposed here, I suggest similar but adapted versions of the questions.

My version of the questions incorporates central ideas of critical realism, prevent possible misunderstandings of conceptualising power (as discussed above), and position systemic analyses as point of departure. As we have learned in the chapter about critical realism, false believes are the roots for misguided actions. Thus, we must apply the best explanatory critique possible to disclose them although the differentiation between *real*, *actual*, and *empirical* prevents us from unveiling our false believes easily. So, the questions aim at simplifying our endeavour to produce explanatory critiques as good as possible to counter these believes. They are the first four cornerstones of transcendental phronetic political geography.

1. What are the geographico-political phenomena of the object under study?

   We must acquire an overview of what is apparent to us in regard to the geographico-political topic in question. By investigating geographico-political phenomena, we deal with higher strata that relate to other strata in terms of composition and emergence. While we cannot produce closed systems on these strata artificially, which would help us to get a glimpse of the *real*, formulating what appears to us into words helps us at least to define the object under study and to get an overview of the problematic.

The first and second question are best answered by pursuing systemic analyses in virtue of Lacoste. Once we can answer the first question, we have our topic formulated and at hand (by means of maps, textual descriptions, pictures, interviews and other techniques). At this stage of our research, we have yet mainly pursued horizontal explanation and suggested cornerstones of our vertical explanation that we still owe.

2. What must the geographico-political positions, practices, and relations be like (what are they and how do they work) for these phenomena to perpetuate?

   Our systemic analysis and explanatory critique continue by addressing the second question. We start to interrelate different scales and contextualise how practices work on different scales in separation.

   On and below the geographico-political strata there are underlying mechanisms in the *real* that make the geographico-political *tend* to be the way it is. Since the geographico-political strata are in *relation* of composition and/or emergence with others, we can pursue vertical explanation.

   By pursuing vertical explanation we will see that the special relations to other strata impose certain restrictions on the strata that we investigate, but the latter's emergent character gives their structures also stratified freedom. We must unveil what imposes restrictions and how the structures produce and reproduce their stratified freedom.

   Bhaskar taught that research within the social sciences must focus on positions, practices, and relations. Social forms which represent the framework of these aspects are only relatively enduring because they are consciously produced and unconsciously reproduced by themselves. We must disclose what all of the three mean in regard to our object under study, and how they operate. We might have already pictured some of them by answering the first question. By answering the second question, we get a better picture of how the aspects stand in connection to other strata, that is, to other scales.

3. What must the (false) believes be like (what are they and how do they work) for the positions, practices, and relations to be consciously produced and unconsciously reproduced by society?

   We saw that social forms continuously reproduce the conditions of their making. In this context, (false) believes are the reasons for our actions. By asking the third question, we aim to disclose what these (false) believes are and how they perpetuate within different social forms so that the prevalent positions, practices, and relations prevail.

   Believes are false, if they have the characteristics of tension points: 'fraught with dubious practices, contestable knowledge and potential conflict' (Flyvbjerg,

Landman and Schram 2012a, 288). We must necessarily connect what we learn here to what we disclosed by answering the second question.

The combination of stratified freedom and *false* believes is toxic. Stratified freedom makes human agency possible and enables us to act because of reason that we find in believes. These believes can be false and result in misguided actions. By disclosing false believes, our research gets a critical and emancipatory momentum.

Showing that the believes are false, we provide reasons to drop them. This opens up the possibility to adopt other believes. The explanatory critique that we provided by answering the first, second, and third question implicitly provides alternatives.

4. What would the geographico-political phenomena be like if we were to adopt other believes instead?

   In this context it is important to note that it is 'other believe*s*' and not 'another' or 'a true belief;' the plural form is crucial. By disclosing a false believe we cannot necessarily claim that its opposite version is true. The world, especially on strata that we consider as social scientists, is not binary. Through research of the proposed type we can show that prevalent believes are false and the resulting actions misguided, but we cannot necessarily claim that facing the other way will make things 'better.'

   Nonetheless, our research provided us with insights on how things go wrong. And, as Collier (1994, 165) argues, '[b]y seeing how something goes wrong we find out more about the conditions of its working properly than we ever would by observing it working properly. […] Mechanisms which are normally disguised by their closer interaction with other ones break loose and so are actualized, whereas they normally operate unactualized – just as the law of gravity operates unactualized in your house until one day the roof falls down on your head.' We start wondering how to utilise the underlying mechanisms and get acquainted with their limits. We start to comprehend what we must pay attention to when we deal with the geographico-political outcomes and the object under study in question.

   In connection with what we have learned through our contextualisation and the prudence we could acquire through unveiling the prevalent false believes, we are able to think of alternative scenarios. This does not mean that we can *predict*

> how a future world on the geographico-political strata must and will look like (since, as we saw, prediction is impossible in the social sciences). But we were successful in transforming our false believes into novel knowledge, which gives us a better idea about how the geographico-political structures in question *tend* to operate. We became aware of the extent to which false believes have been misguiding actions, and thus how the prevalent situation is consciously produced and unconsciously reproduced by particular social forms.

At this stage, only we are aware that the prevalent believes about the geographico-political topic in question are false – and maybe friends or colleagues we introduced to our research. The next step, as claimed by Flyvbjerg especially, is to start dialoguing about the discovery and hold the mirror up to society. This is when the scientists' social responsibility comes into play. We must develop geographico-political *scenarios* that will perpetuate, if we were to publish our findings and the false believes were dropped. This is comparable to some sort of utopian thinking. By doing so, we provide alternatives for the future geographico-political world and, most importantly, prepare society for future false believes – since the scenarios are most probably coupled with false believes by and of themselves. Since structures of the geographico-political *tend* to operate a particular way, we cannot predict what will happen, but by providing multiple scenarios, our chances are higher to consider relevant ones.

In the social sciences, we cannot create closed systems to investigate the object under study. And the strata we investigate are susceptible to false believes especially. Thus, we are doomed to repeat the process above over and over again. The transformational model of social activity tells us that social forms produce and reproduce the conditions of their making. By pursuing transcendental phronetic political geography, we can engage in this process and influence it to some extent (see Figure 4.2 on page 76). Critical realism, phronetic social science, and Lacoste's Hérodotian school provide us both the justification and the means to do so.

Now, let us take a closer look on some guidelines that will help to accomplish this endeavour. In the previous chapter we have already grouped Flyvbjerg's guidelines into three categories: ontology, emancipation, and ethics. With these guidelines, Flyvbjerg attempts to provide a tool set that allows critical and emancipatory research. Because this goes along with what we attempt to argue for, it is worth considering. So, we

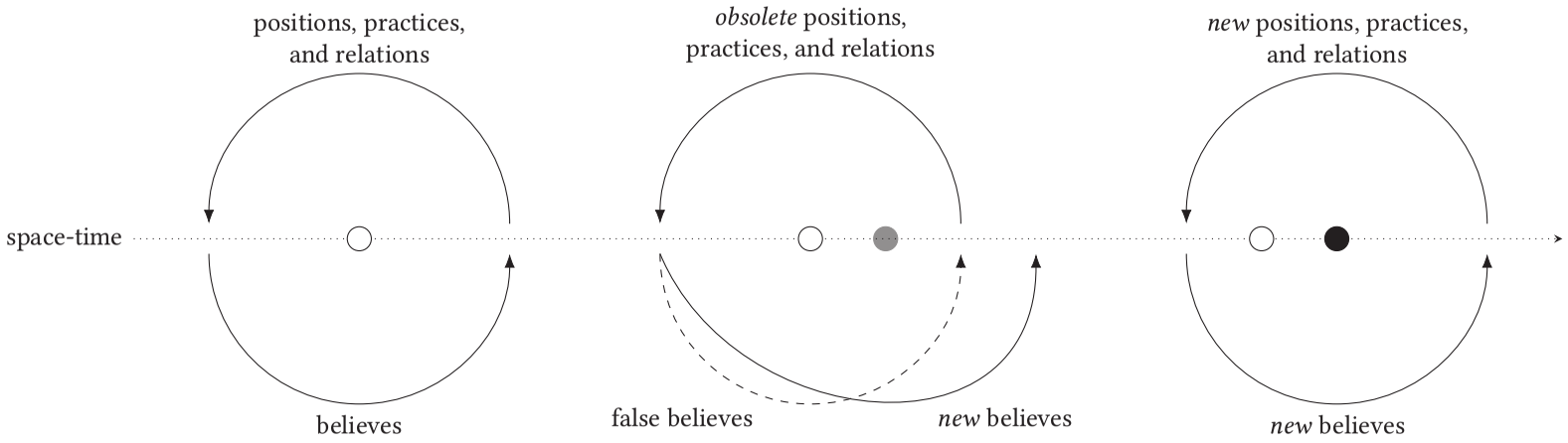

Figure 4.2: New believes stimulate new practices. Around the geographico-political phenomena in question ○ there exist prevailing believes, positions, practices, and relations. These are in a reciprocal relationship and sustain our transitive object of knowledge about phenomena in question. Once we acquired new believes, a new transitive object ● starts to form, and the prevailing positions, practices, and relations become obsolete. If the new belives are sustained, new positions, practices, and relations will develop around the phenomena in question – a new transitive object of knowledge ● will prevail. This process must repeat continuously to stimulate an improvement.

will summarise and contextualise the categories in regard to what we learned in this chapter.

In regard to ontology, Flyvbjerg demands to research close to reality, to study cases and context, to emphasise 'little things,' and to move beyond agency and structure. Researching close to reality can be achieved by self-reflecting the own endeavours permanently, and producing research that is socially valuable, according to Flyvbjerg. This falls in line with Lacoste's argument for the complexity of the geographico-political, and the responsibility of geographers who address it. Pursuing the proposed research programme, researchers appreciate that they can only grasp the *empirical* and must be prudent about their thoughts. Simultaneously, they aim at disclosing false believes – which is socially-valuable by nature (recall Bhaskar's argument). By means of systemic analysis and recognising that strata, thus scales, stand in relation, we open the possibility to move beyond agency and structure and to emphasise little things. Overall, the proposed research programme accepts the complexity of everything geographico-political and provides options for proper investigations.

In context of emancipation, phronetic inquiry puts practice before discourse, requires the researcher to do narrative, and to publish the research outcomes for the populace. We criticised the first guideline in the previous chapter, so let us adapt it to support the purposes of the proposed approach. Rather than emphasising practice, we considered practice and discourse as equally important since they are in a reciprocal relationship. This also becomes visible in Bhaskar's argument about transitive knowledge: It is not only practice that forms our knowledge, but also what we think about what we think. How we articulate what we think (in science) and how we discuss our knowledge with others, forms new practices, transitive knowledge, and discourses.

The subsequent two guidelines demand to publish our research, and to do it in such a way that it is accessible to the broader public. As a consequence, researchers must actively raise awareness about their research. They are responsible to articulate what they disclosed, as Lacoste claims. He also demonstrates how to do so by distributing the journal *Hérodote* his way. He has been actively engaged with how geography is understood and taught at universities. Only this way we can counter the perpetuation of false believes in question. It is not sufficient to disclose false believes, but necessary to raise awareness about the fact that they are false. Otherwise they continue to perpetuate.

Let us now turn to the guidelines that are concerned with ethics: focusing on power and values. We saw that Bhaskar and Flyvbjerg use the term 'power' differently since

Flyvbjerg is not aware of the three domains that Bhaskar developed. What Flyvbjerg tries to achieve with the two guidelines is to engage in the positions, practices, and relations of social forms. For him, values are socially and historically conditioned. The argument goes that by developing an attitude that is based on a view supported by society, the researcher is legitimised to put forward their attitude. In Bhaskar's transformational model of social activity, the aim is also to understand the relations within which society produces and reproduces itself. According to him, production and reproduction happen consciously and unconsciously respectively.

It stands to reason that power comes with assigning values to positions and practices within society. The dominant and the dominated are who they are because we assign particular values to their positions and practices, which, in turn, forms a particular relation of power. Bhaskar sees the foundation for positions, practices, and relations in (false) believes while Flyvbjerg sees them in values and powers. Thus, we see that both Flyvbjerg and Bhaskar try to conceptualise the same thing.

From my point of view, Flyvbjerg's conceptualisation is more elusive because it is inherently connected to the idea that researchers must develop an attitude they need to validate with the socially and historically conditioned context. If they did so, they would again produce and reproduce what society values – maybe even *false* believes. On the contrary, Bhaskar opens the possibility for a critical momentum by tackling false believes. These believes are false because they do not correspond to what our explanatory critique disclosed, and not because they do not represent a particular attitude. They are, what Flyvbjerg assigns to tension points: 'fraught with dubious practices, contestable knowledge and potential conflict' (2012a, 288). While we can see positions, practices, and relations through patterns of power, the only way to stay critical, and provide research outcomes that can emancipate, is by showing that prevailing believes are false.

Hence, to focus on values and power is important since they can disclose positions, practices, and relations. Flyvbjerg agrees with Foucault that forms of resistance can be an indicator for such relations. But to be able to claim that our research does not rely on attitudes, we must focus our research on (false) believes too. In connection to positions, practices, and relations, believes are necessary for relations of power to form. By pursuing explanatory critiques, we can disclose believes and show that they are false; question the prevailing practices, positions, and relations; and initiate change.

4.4 What can we do with it? What is it for? What can it *cause*?

The purpose of transcendental phronetic political geography is to provide a base for critical and emancipatory research that investigates everything geographico-political. Transcendental realism and its implications for the social sciences legitimate, through philosophical arguments, critical and emancipatory research in general. Flyvbjerg's accounts on phronetics provide a similar argument for the social sciences in particular – independently from Bhaskar's accounts – and contribute methodological guidance on how to do so. Although Lacoste has been overlooking these ideas, he has been providing substantial contributions to political geography that share a transcendental realist understanding and pursue notions of phronesis. Since all of these approaches are neglected and/or overlooked by political geographers, in this section we (a) assessed their key ideas, (b) disclosed their affinities, and (c) combined the ideas into a new research approach.

The advantages of the approach to the prevalent approaches of the discipline lie at hand. Since we can only discuss a fraction of what is debated in regard to meta-theory in political geography, we consider the two most extreme examples: neorealism and critical geopolitics (see Kofroň 2012). Neorealism is guided by a positivist attitude, thus victim of the epistemic fallacy. Its ontology is flat because the nation-state is the most (if not the only) important agent. Thus, the approach fails to appreciate that the world is stratified. Neorealism cannot pursue vertical explanation and cannot do justice to the concerns about scale mentioned above. The approach does not include a spatial account. While even more recent forms of realism such as neoclassical realism try to deal with both local and global processes, they do not include a critical and/or emancipatory turn, thus fail to justify researchers' stance within society (for this approach see G. Rose 1998; Taliaferro 2006). Not to mention that adapted versions of 'realism' in geography tend to be de-formed to 'GeoRealisms' (see our discussion on Mäki and Oinas 2004).

While critical geopolitics focuses on the influence of discourse on practice, it struggles to provide arguments departing from spatial accounts. The approach fails to describe the relation of discourse and the substantive world (see also Thrift 2000). Although research pursued in virtue of the approach tends to include normative accounts, it lacks philosophical reasoning to justify them. Last but not least, like neorealism, critical geopolitics is based on a flat ontology. The approach is based on transcendental idealism, thus falls victim to the epistemic fallacy too.

This is not to say that transcendental phronetic political geography is 'better' or

'superior' to the aforementioned approaches. A proper systemic analysis includes an account of the processes that happen on the level of nation-states. Likewise it includes an assessment of discourses that relate to the geograpico-political phenomena in question. The proposed approach must be seen as overall umbrella that contextualises such findings. Nevertheless it is not limited to these approaches. Every attempt to provide an explanatory critique of the prevailing believes and practices is legitimate; the questions and guidelines mentioned above can help to do so.

While we discussed the usage of the approach only in relation to the objects under study that relate to concepts of power, space, scale, and justice, the new approach might also be applicable to other contexts. The aforementioned concepts are of special concern for disciplines that investigate strata of the geographico-political, such as geopolitics. Maybe it is also possible to adapt the approach for other strata.

Obviously, within the scope of a masters' thesis, we can discuss the affinities and the combination of critical realism, phronetic social science, and Lacoste's Hérodotian school only incipiently. While we tried to consider key literature in regard to the three approaches, it is more than possible that particular arguments within related debates object to such a combination. Because there are massive amounts of literature for each of them available, I am convinced that relevant arguments (objecting and supporting) slipped through my hands. Nonetheless, during my research I did not come across arguments that either support or object to the fusion of the approaches.

From the standpoint that we have discussed thus far, it is impossible to predict what the proposed approach can *cause* once it is applied. The journey we made throughout the last four chapters shares characteristics with transcendental phronetic inquiries by and of itself. We disclosed false believes of meta-theoretical positions within geopolitics and provided an alternative scenario for researching everything geographico-political. We questioned the positions, practices, and relations of researchers in reference to society. We objected to traditional accounts of *causation*, and raised arguments for *tendencies* instead. Transcendental phronetic political geography *tends* to spur a reconsideration of prevailing believes and pracices; an articulation of these insights to the populace; an awareness about the tension points; and *tends* to initiate change. If the change will create new tension points, the approach can disclose them. Thus, the approach sustains the necessity of sciences that investigate the geographico-political strata.

* * *

In this chapter we strengthened the argument for combining critical realism and phronetic social science; further, we supplemented ideas of the French school of *géopolitiques* to spur a systemic analysis that is called 'transcendental phronetic political geography.' This approach is framed by four key questions:

1. What are the geographico-political phenomena of the object under study?
2. What must the geographico-political positions, practices, and relations be like (what are they and how do they work) for these phenomena to perpetuate?
3. What must the (false) believes be like (what are they and how do they work) for the positions, practices, and relations to be consciously produced and unconsciously reproduced by society?
4. What would the geographico-political phenomena be like if we were to adopt other believes instead?

Moreover, we argued that stratifiction – and in this context horizontal and vertical explanation – can help to develop a full-fledged account of geographico-political research that considers multiple scales. This way, we do justice to the complex ontology of geographico-political phenomena. When we focus on values and power, and how they influence positions, practices, and relations within socio-spatial systems, we can disclose false believes. In turn, disclosing and debating these believes helps to question prevailing traditions and habits. The advantage of the approach is that it can act as an umbrella term incorporating geographico-political research that is more encompassing than traditional approaches while sustaining philosophical and methodological rigour. The scope of the thesis provides us to deal with such an approach only initiatively.

In the following chapter, we will assess the proposed approach by epitomising its application to the case of Cairo's informal urban settlements.

Chapter 5

Getting the bigger picture of participatory development in Cairo

Certainly, pursuing the developed approach for the Cairo case adequately would require more space than this chapter can offer. While the approach enables us to contextualise both holistic and analytical research; conducting such an attempt could fill an entire masters' thesis (if not a dissertation) on its own. Because of this, the chapter at hand can address the situation in Cairo only incipiently. Nonetheless, the endeavour undertaken here is crucial for transcendental phronetic political geography to hoist the sails. By epitomising the situation in Cairo, we will see that vertical explanation is vital for getting the bigger picture of any geographico-political phenomenon in question. The substantive example shall help to clarify what has hitherto only been pursued in meta-theory.

To recall, the original research question (How to improve the living conditions of the 'left-behind' …?) can be understood as addressing either the substantive or the meta-theoretical level. In the course of this chapter, we will apply our argumentation of the last chapter to the substantive concern of the question. I will provide a short explanatory critique of how the improvement of the living conditions of the left-behind in Cairo is addressed by various actors of different strata at the moment. To do so, the chapter is divided into four sections, each addressing one of the questions that frame transcendental phronetic political geography as developed in the previous chapter. Even though the substantive discoveries are enlightening, the pursuit of this chapter is in virtue of clarifying the meta-theoretical concern of the thesis.

5.1 Cairo: an informal city embedded in planetary urbanisation

Let us first acquire a general overview of the topic by answering the question: What are the geographico-political phenomena of the object under study? In other words, what becomes *apparent* to us in regard to informal urban settlements in Cairo?

First and foremost, recent work in urban studies appreciates that today's form of urbanisation is totally different from what we witnessed during the Industrial Revolution. It dissociates itself from 'cityism' and recognises that 'cities are just a form of urbanization' (Gandy 2014). This not only implies that spaces *outside* the urban fabric become 'urban,' but that the entire planet gets operationalised (Brenner 2014b). According to this idea, the only deed of particular spaces is to function for other sites around the world. This new form of urbanisation is called '*planetary* urbanisation' (see contributions in Brenner 2014a, emphasis by me). Thus, local inequalities must be understood as a symptom of a *global* process, and a clear differentiation between events of local and global processes crumbles.

While the aforementioned perspective stems from research within urban studies, research of political geography also tends to question the demarcation of distinct scales from another. We discussed these notions already in the previous chapter. In regard to the case at hand, we can find further contributions that challenge the city/state dichotomy in particular (see Taylor 2000b, 2007; see also McCann and Ward 2010). Here, authors question the supremacy of the nation-state over smaller entities. The influence of processes of the city-scale to stimulate global processes is more appreciated. We saw that sovereignty must be reconsidered when accepting that different strata are in relation of both composition and emergence. Thus, we can accept that there is reciprocal influence.

Spatially, the distinction between areas that work for the wealth of others and areas that benefit from it manifests in the omnipresence of informal urban settlements world-wide. Davis (2004) speaks of a 'planet of slums' where negative examples of today, such as Jakarta, Dhaka, Karachi, Shanghai, and Mumbai, will propagate in the near future. Engelke (2013) mentions the accompanying concerns, such as environmental, resource, climate, health, and human security. Informal urban settlements (or 'slums') are where people, by claiming their space not formally but informally, struggle to get a piece of the actions that happen through economic and diplomatic relations. These come with planetary urbanisation.

Concerning Cairo for example, Davis mentions the growth of 'slum cities in the

air' (2004, 13) because more and more people have started to create their shelter on rooftops. Of the nearly 18 million people that live in Cairo more than 60 percent live in informal urban areas (Sims 2010, 96; Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit 2015). Informal urban settlements in Cairo are a known phenomenon as a thesis from 1981 shows (Sioufi 1981). In the last decades people have started to use arable land for building their informal homes. The population of these households struggles to ensure their daily necessities which makes poverty in Cairo underestimated (Sabry 2010). Nevertheless, they have become known as contributing their part of solving the national housing crisis while the government is infamous for neglecting their needs (El-Batran and Arandel 1998). In this context urban segregation has been an ubiquitous phenomenon of Cairo's history (Abdelbaseer 2015).

We may not forget that Cairo is an informal city embedded in Egypt, a semi-authoritarian state (see also Hassan 2011). With this in mind, it is not surprising that the state has been reluctant to make any efforts mapping or measuring the extension of their capital's informal housing by itself. Rather, it has relied on the investigations undertaken by third parties (see Sims 2010, 97). While each governor, that is, the position that is responsible for the city-scale, controls an 'important center of political power' (253), the entire structure is controlled by the president. Only recently, this president has become 'acutely aware of the negative security implications of informal settlements' (Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit 2015, 2).

Since 1998 a German company that conducts development co-operation called *Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit GmbH (GIZ)* – formerly known as *Gesellschaft für Technische Zusammenarbeit GmbH (GTZ)* – has been engaged with the informal urban settlements of Cairo (see Gesellschaft für Technische Zusammenarbeit 2003). On behalf of the German Ministry for Economic Co-operation and Development, the association has been engaged in two projects called 'Participatory Urban Management Programme' (1998-2003) and 'Participatory Development Programme in Urban Areas' (2004-2018) to achieve the following objective (Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit Egypt 2015; see also Piffero 2009, 14; Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit 2015):

> Public administration and civil society organisations [of Cairo] collaborate in improving services and environmental conditions for the poor urban population.

In the most recently available evaluation report, the project claims to be active on the national, regional, and local level (Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit 2015).

The evaluation says that the project applies a 'multi-actor and multi-level approach' by collaborating with 'citizens, civil society organisations, private sector companies and local administration.' In 2014, it has founded the Ministry of Urban Renewal and Informal Settlements (MURIS) of Cairo and continuously provides grants to 'local leaders' and governorates, according to the report. In the project's current phase (2010-2018), it has raised funding of roughly 50 million Euros while nearly 40 million Euros stem from contributions of the European Union. The document describes the situation as follows (Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit 2015):

> The size of the nine selected informal areas, their inadequate supply with infrastructure and services as well as the lacking capacity of the local administration to develop and implement participatory processes, are equally indicative of the high relevance of the programme.

Hence, the *Participatory Development Programme* deals with the global problematic of planetary urbanisation in particular parts of Cairo, Egypt. On the site, there are fundamentally different types of actors involved: the local population that is 'left-behind;' the local population that co-operates with donors directly; *Gesellschaft für internationale Zusammenarbeit Egypt*, that is the Egyptian branch of the German association; the main branch of the organisation in Germany; the German ministry, the European Union, the Egyptian Ministries; the Egyptian state; and others. Thus, we deal with national, supranational, and non-governmental actors that claim sovereignty on a variety of scales. It is a very complex system of power relations.

5.2 Development co-operation: an enmeshment of geographico-political phenomena

Now, let us disclose the prevailing circumstances that are responsible for what just became apparent to us. What must the geographico-political positions, practices, and relations be like (what are they and how do they work) for the aforementioned aspects to perpetuate? Generally speaking, there must be someone who has and someone who needs. This is a very complex system of relations and comes with certain impasses.

Mutual dependency makes aid unpredictable because beneficiaries try to acquire the best offer they can grab, and donor countries try to serve the best offer they can contribute while both compete with many other competitors that try to do the same (Canavire-Bacarreza, Neumayer and Nunnenkamp 2015). In context of bilateral

development co-operation, the prevailing power relations are set in stone because of loose accountability (Nyamu-Musembi and Cornwall 2004, 47). To the greater extent, the donor organisation is bounded to its home country than to the country it delivers aid to, because the home country is where the money comes from.

The aspects just mentioned make it less surprising that official development assistance has been increasing greatly while country programmable aid has been decreasing (see Kharas 2007). While the relations between donor organisations and their home countries is carved in stone, whether the provided resources actually reach the beneficiaries remains an open question. If the beneficiaries are embedded within a political system that tends to reject the importance of developing its nation, the prospects are even worse. Yet, donor countries often miss the impact that the political structure of the receiving country has. The conference on aid effectiveness held in Busan has shown that there has been no progress made recognising this concern (Booth 2012).

What is taken into consideration though, are geopolitical aspects (Alesina and Dollar 2000; see also Berthélemy 2006). Generally, countries tend to receive more resources if they have a colonial past, are open to trade, and democratic. This makes the high amount of aid that flows to Egypt in comparison to other countries even more surprising. 'Being Egypt,' as Alesina and Dollar (2000, 40) puts it ironically, is a characteristic of a country that can increase offerings by more than 400 percent. This significantly high support that Egypt receives originates from a variety of countries, which includes Germany among others. While Alesina does not mention specific geopolitical interests that could explain this significance, it stands to reason that Egypt's geostrategic position, such as controlling the Suez canal, is one aspect. These reasons ease overlooking authoritarian leaders (see further Sparrow 2016).

For a development project to reduce poverty, three premisses must be met, according to Devas (2001): First, the project must be embedded within a system that considers votes of the poor. Second, a framework must exist that enables the government to address the needs. Third, the society that is affected must be dynamic, claiming their rights. Hence, the *Participatory Development Programme* must challenge the authoritarian regime in Egypt. If it cannot change the regime, votes will not be considered; whether an appropriate framework is implemented will remain questionable; and the society will be hindered in claiming their rights. In this context, the recent revolts are only a drop in the ocean (see Wiarda 2012). Moreover, as we will see in the next section, the programme fails to establish both an institutional framework for the impoverished to

raise their voice and give them a choice.

5.3 When (false) believes serve self-preservation

So, what must the (false) believes be like for the aforementioned positions, practices, and relations to be consciously produced and unconsciously reproduced by society? Let us first summarise what we just saw. Generally speaking, there is evidence that participatory development co-operation is doomed to fail in Egypt. Here, 'failing' means, while the actions of the association have *some* impact, they do not spur what participatory development tries to encourage: an empowerment and improvement of the living conditions of those impoverished. Nonetheless, we saw that the German state and the European Union continue their engagement in this type of fostering development. Funding continues and the association started a follow-up project. So we can assume that some form of misinformation prevails. According to Balbo, there is considerable evidence that statistics about the performance of development are embellished (2013, 278):

> As it has ironically been stressed, UN statisticians succeeded overnight where governments, aid agencies, finance institutions and NGOs had failed for decades, pulling out of their miserable housing conditions tens of millions of slum dwellers.

While the overall narrative goes that globalisation and economic interdependence generates prosperity for everyone, it is based on the opinion and statistical hegemony of a few (Wade 2004).

Likewise, participation in development co-operation is actually full of paradoxes. As an investigation of participatory approaches in Mumbai has shown, it is not the poor who benefit but 'influential community members, small private entrepreneurs and middlemen' (Zérah 2009). While the – in comparison – already powerful gain additional power, labour becomes even more informalised. Because, instead of providing participation, non-governmental organisation can often only provide technical infrastructure through sub-contracts, the positions of already established individuals are strengthened, and the poor remain poor. As a matter of fact, similar experiences are also made in Dar es Salaam (see Dill 2009). Rather than empowering those in need, the creation of community-based organisations lead to their exclusion. In this case, one of the paradoxes is the false believe of donors that if participatory attempts are legitimised on the national scale, they can also find legitimacy locally. Another is the false believe that

organising local groups creates platforms for the neglected. In fact neither is the case, as the two examples show. Moreover, as has been stressed elsewhere, such 'localism' belittles local inequalities, prevailing power relations, and the geopolitical interests we discussed above (Mohan and Stokke 2000).

What is the situation like in Cairo? While the German association has been interpreting the local circumstances unidirectionally by focusing on the miserable situation of informal urban settlements (see for example Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit Egypt 2013, 2015; Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit 2016), David Sims underlines the positive sides of the settlements and contests 'stereotypical generalizations that many are quick to apply to Third World megacities' (Sims 2010, 1; see further Sanyal 2015; cf. Davis 2004). Since competition is high and living conditions challenging, citizens of both informal *and formal* housings struggle for a 'decent livelihood' (Sims 2010, 119). In fact, the income inequality between residents of informal and formal areas is low (111). Since poverty is also a problem in formal areas, the poor who live in informal areas benefit from much more affordable housing. In addition, informal areas are much more secure because there dominate personal ties between residents and the city is less anonymous. It stands to reason that we cannot simply impose our Northern conception of cities on Southern cities. Informality can be a pragmatic way of dealing with any housing situation (see also Watson 2009). This is not to drop the concerns about informal settlements but to stimulate a more refined debate about the geographico-political situation there.

Before we investigate the programme in Cairo in more detail, let us contextualise what we discussed thus far. We see that donors tend to overlook – consciously or unconsciously – their great dependence on the political structure of the receiving country for their measurements to actually achieve what they intend to. Especially in regard to participatory development co-operation, scholars have raised the concern that such implementations are accompanied by paradoxes. In the Egyptian case, the association involved bolsters the necessity for their actions and informs about the site unidirectionally.

While the most recent evaluation of the project in question concludes that the project is 'rather successful' (ironically, conducted by the association itself), Elena Piffero's assessment of the situation is devastating (Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit 2015; Piffero 2009). Why is that? According to her, 'participatory development is aimed at giving a voice *and* a choice to the voiceless and "choice-less"'

and is 'better considered as a highly political methodology of empowerment' (Piffero 2009, 180, 186). In accordance with other academics, she saw a concern in promoting participation, which is inevitably linked to a democratisation process, in a country that is in a grey zone between authoritarianism and democratisation. Between January 2006 and December 2008 she has conducted her research focusing on three aspects: the form of participation that has been promoted; who has been empowered through the efforts taken by the project; and whether the project could enhance good governance.

According to her, not only has there been a general misunderstanding of what 'participation' means, but the great amount of negative lessons learned from the preceding project were not taken into consideration when the team started to implement the follow-up project (181). In most cases, the grants that were given to local non-governmental organisations helped them to implement their 'hidden agendas' and worked for their own interest instead of the overall aim of the *Participatory Development Programme* (182).

Like the other cases mentioned, participation rather leads to the empowerment of the already empowered. She notes that, by addressing informal urban areas, it is not necessarily the poor who benefit from a development programme that focuses on informal urban areas. This is because such areas are much more heterogene. Often, the residents that benefited from the measurements by the programme were those that had enough 'political connection' and had already established their stance in a locality in question. Both the preceding and the follow-up project currently running performed poorly because they neither reached the people in need nor provided satisfactory awareness of the project itself in its areas. Instead of empowering the weak, the programme managed to empower 'already powerful groups' and '[p]ower relationships were left by and large untouched' (184). This is due to the 'absence of any socio-political movement or counter-élite able to endorse and appropriate the transformative project attached to participation-as-empowerment' because it 'nullified the "democratising" potential intrinsic to participation' (184). (We will discuss this aspect from the critical realist standpoint in more detail in the next section.)

Piffero concludes that the given political environment would have doomed any *local* development project to fail. While there could be achieved some success in terms of infrastructural upgrading, this success is not at all related to any achievements providing participation. Instead, the participatory approach of the programme strengthened existing political structures by 'calm[ing] down' the poor (184-6). Thus Piffero (2009,

177) sees the project as

> a rather self-referential project which is talking to itself about itself and is producing a huge amount of documentation clarifying the project's assumptions without analysing their practical effects.

While Piffero's dissertation is publicly available on the project's website, the teaser of the upload remains doubtful since it neither assesses nor comments on the findings.[1]

Similar deficiencies are visible when taking a closer look on the most recent evaluation of the project. The evaluation by Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit (2015, 3) itself rates the project 'rather successful' taking into consideration the following concern (3):

> As far as the comparison of the current status of the PDP to the projected targets in concerned, one has to take into consideration that this evaluation of the programme represents something like a mid-term review, as the implementation period of the actual phase is still on-going until the end of 2018. This evaluation can thus only show the current state of implementation.

The fact that the evaluation is conducted within a particular *phase* notwithstanding, we may not forget that the project itself has been running for more than 15 years. That is, the given excuse is questionable.

In regard to the project's impact, the report concludes that the 'small- and medium-scale upgrading measures started with a delay' and that the 'committees of inhabitants in the target areas' are 'currently inactive.' In this context the report *prospects* that the poor population 'will be strengthened' (5). In general, when evaluating the impact that any project *had*, there is no space for the future tense. Taking the amount of funding and time into concern, the population should have already been strengthened.

On the same page, the report claims that the 'impact will be enhanced' and that '[f]unding reaches the target population directly.' But it admits that it could not implement the participatory measures because of the 'volatile political and institutional environment.' The evaluation continues:

1. 'Elena Piffero's PhD thesis with the title "What Happened to Participation? Urban Development and Authoritarian Upgrading in Cairo's Informal Neighbourhoods" is based on sound empirical evidence and a fascinating reading for anyone interested in Cairo and in the contradictions between development theories and practices. Her analysis follows three sets of questions: the first set regards the way 'participation' has been interpreted and concretised by PUMP and PDP. The second is about the emancipating potential of the 'participatory approach' and its ability to 'empower' the 'marginalised'. The third focuses on one hand on the efficacy of GIZ strategy to lead to an improvement of the delivery service in informal areas (especially in terms of planning and policies), and on the other hand on the potential of GIZ development intervention to trigger an incremental process of 'democratisation' from below.' (Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit Egypt 2009)

> Due to the current political volatility, it is however impossible to predict whether this will allow the programme sustainably strengthen an agenda for inclusive urban development. […] The sustainability of the programme's impacts cannot yet be ensured at the moment due to the volatile circumstances.

Thus, in accordance to what we learned about participatory development, we can agree with Piffero that the project is doomed to fail and far from being 'rather successful.' The political environment makes the implementation of a participatory approach impossible. But the problem is that the persons in charge falsely believe – consciously or unconsciously – that their pursuit is successful. They hold on to a sinking ship, refraining to admit that it leaks.

My greatest concern is that, not only does the project fail to help, but it even worsens the situation. As we already discussed, projects of this type tend to strengthen the already powerful. Piffero concluded the same for the project in question. Moreover, accepting the implementation of a *participatory* programme can bolster the image of the authoritarian leader. It gives leverage to claim that, while the situation for the poor is miserable, measurements are taken to improve the situation.

Concluding, the geographico-political situation in Cairo is full of false believes. Informal urban settlements – especially in Cairo – are much more heterogene than expected. Localism is not the key to success. And even established development projects do not necessarily implement what they are expected to. Rather, they try to sustain false believes for self-preservation.

5.4 Scenarios for reconsidering participatory development in Cairo

Let us now conclude this chapter by answering the following question: What would the geographico-political phenomena be like if we were to adopt other believes instead? Since the arguments provided here only represent the very beginning of a transcendental phronetic inquiry of the geographico-political situation around informal settlements in Cairo, the following arguments must be taken with a grain of salt.

First and foremost, simply dropping the measurements that are conducted is not a solution. As we have seen, the project is enmeshed in a variety of geographico-political processes. If the European Union and the other guarantors were to stop their engagement, consequences will perpetuate from the local to the global scale, most probably these will be difficult to get hold of. Our concern should be to challenge the false believes, trying to diminish them.

Second, the greatest problem I see is the great opacity that prevails in regard to the funding that the projects receives. While we can acquire the project's total amount of funding, we cannot assess the exact measurements and how much they cost. We must rely on the vague evaluations by GIZ that serve self-preservation.

In a request under the regulation regarding the right to access documents by the European Parliament, Council, and Commission (see European Parliament and Council of the European Union 2001), I tried to acquire, among other documents, the Financing Agreement between the European Union and Egypt (see Baudet von Gersdorff 2015). After nearly one year, I remain without success. While I was able to acquire some documents, the email conversation reveals that it is a tedious process. Although I could refer to documents by their reference number, the entire process was complicated by the office that responded to my request.

Third, development co-operations are mainly accountable to the donor entity, so if the public has no means to check both the co-operations and the donors, these will work for their self-preservation.

In the case in question, this is also due to the corporate structure of the association conducting the programme. While there are many structures defined, 'GmbH' is the most prominent one in Germany: it is used for private limited companies. There also exists a similar structure called 'gGmbH' that is used for non-profit organisations. Since GIZ is a GmbH, it is a company that aims at maximising their profit. Not only does this undermine any charitable approach, it protects the company from any request about the measurements that are conducted because they are intra-company. While state-owned organisations must justify their expenses, private organisations of this type are more difficult to control.

There is already produced a great amount of documentation. If organisations were to make these documents public, the wider public could engage in a discourse about how to enhance the conducted measurements. If the processes were more transparent, this would not necessarily lead to an abandonment of projects but would spur critical assessment by third parties. Resources would be allocated more efficient. Participatory development would benefit. And even if participatory approaches were stopped in authoritarian countries entirely, other measurements, such as infrastructural improvements could be undertaken. These, at least, would not empower the already powerful and worsen the status quo.

* * *

In this chapter, we assessed the proposed research approach on the case in Cairo. We saw that the case in question represents a situation where a variety of actors are involved that stem from and deal with multiple scales of the same concern. In this context we epitomised that development co-operation is enmeshed in a variety of geographico-political phenomena. We witnessed the consequences that (false) believes can have: they are used to justify prevailing but highly questionable actions. At the end we gave some perspective on how the false believes can be put under scrutiny for developing alternative practices.

I highly question the measurements of the *Participatory Development Programme in Urban Areas*. Nonetheless, I underline the necessity to engage in informal urban settlements world-wide because people suffer and we must take the security concerns seriously. Thus, we must improve the prevailing frameworks and disclose the prevailing believes. Certainly, if transcendental phronetic political geography was conducted in this case completely, the argumentation above would need to be published, and I would try to stimulate a debate about the concerns mentioned. Writing this thesis is the first step. Hopefully, further steps will follow.

Conclusion

On a journey from the most abstract to the most concrete the thesis shows that – despite prevalent ontological, epistemological and methodological concerns – political geography can suffice the purpose of a critical and emancipatory endeavour that produces socially valuable outcomes without neglecting neither philosophical nor scientific rigour. In this context, it can and must overcome disciplinary boundaries and engage in phenomena that perpetuate on multiple scales. Thus, if pursued as outlined in the thesis, research that investigates geographico-political processes can actively change dubious socio-spatial practices for the better. Following this, social scientists become decisive actors for sustaining the well-being of what they study.

The thesis departs from the naive yet urgent question how we can improve the living conditions of those that remain left-behind on our increasingly urbanised planet. While the question can be read on the substantive level, the thesis reads it on the meta-theoretical level. The prevalent ontological and epistemological uncertainties of social sciences result in inquiries that tend to either refrain from producing normative conclusions or suffer from distancing themselves from the substantive level. To overcome these meta-theoretical doubts we need to hoist the sails toward forgotten meta-theoretical territory.

The research is a guidepost toward sound argumentation why political geography can indeed incorporate normative momentum, and shows how to connect geographico-political disciplines to reality. Here, the greatest dilemma is to find a balance between a suitable ontological standpoint that can incorporate the elusiveness of the object under study, and epistemological and methodological guidelines that prevent 'anything goes approaches' but provide an adequate way to produce socially-relevant research outcomes.

The original research question was translated into three meta-theoretical questions that are answered. First, how can academia translate concerns about prevalent geographico-political phenomena into substantive actions? Academia (that includes

the discipline of political geography) can produce substantive actions by focusing on prevalent positions, practices, and relations within social systems and by disclosing false believes that are connected to them. Here, the focus on values and power is essential. Stratification, as conceptualised by critical realism, further requires us to pursue horizontal and vertical explanations on different scales. Academia can stimulate that misguided actions are abandoned by formulating its findings for the populace.

Second, how can academia legitimate a normative momentum in their research outcomes? Academia can legitimate a normative momentum by relying on the core tenets of critical realism. The concept of stratified freedom makes every social entity a responsible actor that can and must engage with the world that they affect. In fact, academia has lost sight of these notions, neglected *phronesis*, and focused too much on *episteme*, and *techne* as re-conceptualised in phronetic social science.

And third, how can academia ascertain whether the proposed measurements will actually improve and not impair the situation addressed? While nobody can predict whether the informed populace will rather improve than impair the situation in the short run, critical realism and phronetics provide arguments why it will in the long run. If truth is articulated well and its spread is sustained, it will survive and guide practices that spur improvement. Researchers must develop scenarios to be prepared for the impact that such novel knowledge might have. To evaluate the impact of future practices on different administrative levels, the French school of *géopolitiques* provides a method to contextualise how geographico-political phenomena of different scales are related.

The responses rely on critical realism, phronetic social science, and the French school of *géopolitiques*. Each of the approaches engages with a different feature of the aforementioned uncertainty. The first, a philosophy located in-between the radical standpoints of the field describes a third way between neopositivism and postmodernism by developing a distinct philosophical ontology. Since human geography has distorted the critical realist philosophy to some form of 'GeoRealism' (Mäki and Oinas 2004) at the expense of flexibility, the thesis focuses on critical realism's original core. The second, phronetic social science, is an emancipatory method of social inquiry. It contributes epistemological answers and demands substantive outcomes in social inquiries, but lacks both a suitable ontology and an account on spatiality. The third, the French school around *géopolitiques*, is an unappreciated but substantive tradition within political geography. The tradition aims at contributing spatial knowledge for

society to emancipate. Since ‘everything is geopolitical’ (Mamadouh 1998, 239), the approach has developed a systemic approach to deal with socio-political processes and inequalities that perpetuate over multiple scales: from local, national, supranational to global. If considered separately, the three approaches cannot satisfyingly engage with the uncertainty in question, but their combination is highly auspicious.

Thus, the thesis outlines key tenets of a research programme that incorporates their most insightful characteristics. The programme is more encompassing than popular scientific strategies while sustaining philosophical and methodological rigour. Strategies such as neopositivism and poststructuralism both suffer from a flat ontology. At the same time neopositivism refrains from inciting normative research outcomes that are socially relevant; and poststructuralism cannot connect its accounts on discourse to the substantive level of social-spatial practice.

By pursuing the aforementioned guidelines for the *Participatory Development Programme* in Cairo, Egypt, the thesis assesses the approach incipiently. This way it underlines the necessity for similar research. It shows that development co-operation is enmeshed in a variety of geographico-political phenomena that are sustained by false believes. Moreover, by contextualising research that is indirectly and directly connected to the case in question, the thesis argues that the current framework of the development project (and participatory development in general) must be reconsidered.

Certainly, within the scope of a master’s thesis, the arguments above can only be pursued to limited extent. In this context, the following are the most important concerns: The text at hand only incorporates the most central aspects of critical realism and neglects more recent accounts. While it is important to reconsider the core tenets, it would be interesting to assess whether new insights are compatible or incompatible with the proposed approach. Likewise, I suspect that noteworthy arguments can be found in adaptations of critical realism for other disciplines. In regard of phronetic social science, the research only relies on secondary literature concerned with the Foucauldian concept of power and Aristotle’s ideas on *phronesis*. Here it is of special concern to further scrutinise the ability of the concepts to engage in spatial contexts. In regard to the French school, the thesis mainly investigates key text by *Hérodote’s* founder Yves Lacoste. Other scholars of the tradition and further contributions should be consulted for explicitly realist ideas or accounts on phronetics. In addition, concepts that are of special relevance for the approach, such as power, space, scale, and justice, must be related to transcendental phronetic political geography with greater detail. Moreover,

the ideas could probably gain further momentum by connecting them to related debates within political philosophy. Last but not least, further efforts must be taken to disclose false believes within development co-operation – not only in connection to the situation in Cairo, but in general. This includes my duty to continue researching on the case in question and publish the results in the mass media.

These deficiencies notwithstanding, the thesis presents central ideas for research within political geography that aims to actively engage in how humanity structures its living space. I hope to have contributed to the development of a socio-spatial discipline that remains driven by its responsibility.

Abstract

Although an increasing number of donors try to improve the living conditions of inhabitants in informal urban settlements, some studies show that only a very limited amount of provided resources reach those impoverished. The inability of projects to change the situation for the better could point to dubious practices. Despite academia trying to produce socially relevant work, it has failed to translate its criticism into actions at the substantive level. Researchers are perturbed from engaging because of meta-theoretical concerns in regard to normativity, among others. The study scrutinises this dilemma and proposes a solution. It reconsiders the core of critical realism and enhances its metaphysical accounts with epistemological ones from both phronetic social science and the French school of *géopolitiques*. It argues that political geography can challenge dubious practices in the socio-spatial world without losing neither philosophical nor scientific rigour. The ideas are assessed in a short study on a development project in Cairo, Egypt, demonstrating their applicability and usefulness.

Keywords: philosophy of science – critical realism – phronetic social science – *phronesis* – Yves Lacoste – *géopolitiques* – power – space – scale – justice – normativity – poverty reduction

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