HEGELIAN REFLECTIONS ON THE IDEA OF NUCLEAR WAR

Hegelian Reflections on the Idea of Nuclear War

**Dialectical Thinking and the Dialectic of
Mankind**

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To the memory of my father

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*Wo aber Gefahr ist, wächst
Das Rettende auch.*

Hölderlin

Preface

The aim of this book is to reflect in a Hegelian philosophical manner upon the nuclear age. Its more specific purpose is of a two-fold nature. It is to acquaint the reader with the principle of dialectical thinking as it manifests itself in three different though related experiences: in the unfolding of human discourse, in the conceptualisation of scientific methodologies, and in the historical development of self-consciousness. But, because the meaning of method is mainly demonstrated in its application, the objective of the book is also to use dialectic in the effort to comprehend the idea of nuclear war within its historical context. The intellectual appeal and relevance of the inquiry lie in the philosophical approach to thematise a life in danger of committing suicide, and particularly in the way it interprets and to this effect employs Hegel's principle of historical dialectic.

The book grew out of a doctoral dissertation which was written at the London School of Economics and Political Science under the supervision of Philip Windsor. It was examined by Leszek Kolakowski of All Souls College, University of Oxford and the University of Chicago. I would like to extend to both my warmest thanks for their advice and encouragement to make the material available to a wider audience.

However, in the course of preparing its publication the original thesis had to be substantially condensed and revised. The result is a carefully laid out analysis of dialectic. Not only is the classical Greek tradition accorded in-depth consideration. The reasons are also explained why the concern with dialectical thinking has assumed different forms at various historical junctures, and why we can learn from an intellectual device that is part of our philosophical heritage.

The origin of the ideas which underly the present text goes back to my studies in philosophy at the University of Toronto in the 1970s. The emphasis on the close reading of primary sources, ancient and modern, and their meaningful rendering in the light of different historical horizons was one of the most valuable moments in those early years of academic life. I am therefore much indebted to my former teachers, in particular to R. E. Allen, Allan Bloom, D. P. Gauthier, C. B. Macpherson, R. G. McRae, Graem Nicholson, T. M. Robinson and K. Schmitz.

I became aware of the importance of applying the dialectical

method to thinking about one of the most difficult problems of international relations during my graduate studies at the Institut Universitaire de Hautes Etudes Internationales at the University of Geneva. I owe special gratitude to Curt Gasteyger whose enlightening and thought-provoking seminar in Strategic Studies made me realise that, apart from the need for thorough empirical research, there is an even greater urgency to ponder the increasingly global implications of inter-state politics and the attendant threat to the integrity of mankind in a way that allows for their philosophical comprehension. After having nearly changed the world beyond recognition, we must again reflect and learn to wonder.

It was then in subsequent years at the LSE that I was offered the opportunity to work with Philip Windsor in the Department of International Relations. Being a truly inspiring educator, whose human wisdom and philosophical insight into the afflictions of the world exert a deep and lasting influence over his students, Mr Windsor provided me with unfailing moral and intellectual support and guided me patiently through an as yet uncharted field of rumination.

A more direct debt, however, is due to those who have read the final product either as a whole or in part. I have greatly benefited from comments made by Elie Kedourie, Donald McRea, Tom Nossiter and Cyril Smith from the LSE. I would also like to thank Dieter Henrich from the Institut für Philosophie at the Maximilians Universität in Munich for his sincere interest shown in my work. I have profited much from his erudite writings on Hegel and on the ethical problems which the idea of nuclear war poses. These are not only a comment in themselves, but even more so an encouragement to pursue the path of my reflections. A rather distinctive contribution was made by Cyril Smith. In regular and highly rewarding conversations we approached the philosophical problematic of dialectic from a Marxist and Hegelian point of view. Without the dialogue we would not have become aware of our differences. But without the disagreements we would not be united in history either.

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