

*A Review: F. Dallmayr, "Against Apocalypse. Recovering Humanity's Wholeness" (Lanham: Lexington Books, 2016)*

by Simone Taverna

Although the mounting tensions of the Cold War years and the related danger of a nuclear conflict are consigned to the past, the same tension and level of confusion persist today but in different forms. This is the reason why Fred Dallmayr uses the expression "nuclear age" and indicates a broad horizon which includes the totality of human actions in relation to the survival of the human race and the entire planet.

Within this panorama, the author considers politics as the principal vehicle by which to investigate the future developments of these dynamics. In order to define the line between life and death, both theoretical and practical roles of politics are stressed, in a context characterised by the eventual extinction of the human race. Through the writings of Jacques Derrida, the most risky and catastrophic aspects of this era as well as the possibility of an apocalyptic world conflict are examined in depth. Considering that every war is waged in the name of something, Dallmayr rethinks the way in which the French philosopher defines nuclear war: as a conflict that would embody the paradox of being fought "in the name of the name". In other words, there is no value that justifies the use of nuclear weapons, because their usage would prescind every idea of "liberty", "justice", "peace", or any other justification.

The apocalyptic outlook helps in considering humanity in its entirety, causing us to reflect on the actions that backfire on humanity itself as well as on actions that have inedible effects on our planet. Even if Dallmayr considers the role of politics to be central for a necessary change of course, it only constitutes an instrument through which to trigger a conversion of larger radius. According to the author, in order to avoid a potentially catastrophic event, the human race needs a different ethical and moral approach with regards to its own future. For this reason, he speaks of a concrete

practice, generated for political and moral goals, which must be understood in the broadest possible way.

Considering humanity in its entirety has the benefit of simplification, but at the same time, also has the defect of a possible unilateralism that risks to transform a universal vision into sterile and ideological thought. In order to avoid this possibility, Dallmayr presents different examples taken from diverse cultural and religious traditions distant from the Western tradition, but continuously in dialogue with it. He considers the Indian tradition, citing different sources of wisdom literature (from the *Vedas* to the *Bhagavad Gita*) as well as the Chinese tradition (Confucianism). What emerges from this fertile and continuous encounter is the central importance of relationships – understood as indispensable to allow humankind to slow down or, better yet, to avoid the path that seems to lead directly to Apocalypse.

The common thread that runs through all of Dallmayr's reflection is the necessity of dialectic and of communication capable of revitalizing global dynamics. His objective is to underline the importance of relationship both for its value in connecting diverse traditions (in the aspects that they share) and for what this means in absolute terms – viewed in multicultural, environmental and social perspectives. For this purpose, he analyses both the meaning of *loka-samgraha*, a type of Indian “world maintenance” (which indicates the goal of a way of life that has reached perfection and, therefore, finds its natural expression in the care for all living things) and the Hobbesian “natural state” as testimony of a way out of chaos through a relational perspective (one that goes beyond personal interest and moves towards altruistic interest, identified as common interest). Dallmayr delves into the meaning of the Chinese “*Tian-Xia*”, an expression that describes the condition of peaceful life for all humanity, poetically translated as “All-Under-Heaven”, as well as the analysis of Heideggerian existentialist concepts of “being-toward-death”, his holistic conception of Being (called “*Dasein*”) and his evocation of the overturning (*kebre*) of human action.

Considering man in relation to his status as a tenant of the planet helps to think of him as a guest and not as the owner of the place where he lives. It is therefore necessary to think about how humankind can take responsibility for its action through a transversal perspective that the author calls “relationology” or “ontol-

ogy of coexistence”. This finds application in widely diverse fields, as evidenced by the contributions of eclectic scholars par excellence, Raymond Panikkar and Noam Chomsky, which, in turn, inspires Dallmayr’s reflection.

In the absence of alternative action or perspectives, the “nuclear age” seems to be headed toward the apocalypse evoked in the title of this book. This apocalypse seems increasingly probable because it could be provoked in several ways, through the worsening of environmental conditions, because of military action or many other factors. Resisting this outcome, as Fred Dallmayr suggests, means nothing more than, in the final analysis, grasping at the possibility of an existence and of a relationship of humanity with itself, with the planet it inhabits and with its own future.

