
THE METAPHYSICS OF TERROR

The Incoherent
System of
Contemporary
Politics

Rasmus Ugilt

POLITICAL THEORY AND CONTEMPORARY PHILOSOPHY
series editor Michael Marder

B L O O M S B U R Y

The Metaphysics of Terror

The Incoherent System of Contemporary Politics

Rasmus Ugilt

Political Theory and Contemporary Philosophy

Michael Marder, Series Editor

B L O O M S B U R Y
NEW YORK • LONDON • NEW DELHI • SYDNEY

Bloomsbury Academic

An imprint of Bloomsbury Publishing Plc

175 Fifth Avenue

New York

NY 10010

USA

50 Bedford Square

London

WC1B 3DP

UK

www.bloomsbury.com

First published 2012

© Rasmus Ugilt, 2012

All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced or transmitted in any form or by any means, electronic or mechanical, including photocopying, recording, or any information storage or retrieval system, without prior permission in writing from the publishers.

No responsibility for loss caused to any individual or organization acting on or refraining from action as a result of the material in this publication can be accepted by Bloomsbury Academic or the author.

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

A catalog record for this title is available from the Library of Congress

ISBN: HB: 978-1-4411-8252-4

Typeset by Newgen Imaging Systems Pvt Ltd, Chennai, India
Printed and bound in the United States of America

Contents

Introduction: Much Ado about Nothing	1
Part 1 Metaphysica Generalis	
1 The Political Ontology of Terror	35
Part 2 Metaphysica Specialis	
2 The Political Psychology of Terror	93
3 The Political Cosmology of Terror	123
4 The Political Theology of Terror	155
Conclusion: All's Well That Begins Well	195
Notes	205
Bibliography	216
Index	227

Introduction: Much Ado about Nothing

Philosophy sets itself apart from any other academic discipline by its *lack* of discipline. In all other areas of academia one will be able to at least give a negative definition of what counts as a relevant object of study. Philosophy, on the other hand, is exactly that discipline which cannot point to any object of *no* interest. The interest of philosophy is, at least in principle, equally aroused by the structure of subatomic particles, ancient Greek poetry, cats on mats, unicorns, money, terrorism and love. In the words of Hegel: ‘the truth is the whole’ (Hegel, Werke III, 24).¹

But while philosophy has always had some aspiration towards totality, the totality was always too large or too unfathomable to grasp. Indeed, how does one *say* the whole? In the end, it seems as if the only adequate description of the whole would be the whole itself. And so, more often than not, philosophy ended up in some sort of reduction of everything to *one* thing (i.e. water, nature, discourse, the will to power, spirit, matter, substance, etc.). This manoeuvre of explaining, understanding, reducing the chaotic and unruly multiplicity of the whole to the more manageable *one*, has often been described as the kernel of metaphysics. Metaphysics has long been known as the discipline which searches for the one principle through which the world, or the whole if you will, can be explained as a system.

In the so-called School-Philosophy of the eighteenth century, in which philosophers such as Christian Wolff and Alexander Baumgarten were prominent, this notion of metaphysics was perfected and developed in great detail. On one hand, one would ask the general question of *what* being is, that is, what is the one through which we can explain everything else; on the other hand, one would ask the more specific question of *which* beings could be said to exist. The first type of questioning was termed *Metaphysica Generalis*, and the second was called *Metaphysica Specialis*. General metaphysics could also be termed ontology as it concerned itself with the question of being in its most general aspect. Particular metaphysics was in the hands of the scholastics turned into three distinct disciplines that concerned themselves with the questions of the specific beings of the human soul, the world and God in the subdisciplines of psychology, cosmology and theology respectively.²

As awkward as the idea may seem, the proposal of the present investigation is that one should understand our current predicament and the great political questions of our time under the heading of the metaphysics of terror, in this scholastic sense. We should in other words be investigating the ontology, the psychology, the cosmology and the theology of terror.

Such an approach surely requires an explanation. It is the objective of the introduction to give it. I will therefore in the following pages present my overall view of how metaphysical investigations should be conducted. It should be clear that this can only be done by engaging in some way in metaphysical discussions – at least in the form of a prolegomena. The discussion of how metaphysical investigations should be conducted is undertaken therefore by following the development of metaphysics from Kant, to Hegel and in the end, to Schelling.

While the division that guides the present study is scholastic in origin, taking these three as one's guides means that the contents of the four parts are not. If metaphysics traditionally can be defined as the search for the one that provides the founding principle of the whole, the claim I make here is that the one is not simply one. The one splits into two. The paradoxical nature of this claim should be embraced in full. Whatever is posited as the one principle through which the whole can be interpreted as system, that one will reveal an internal incoherence or a split; not in the sense that it turns out to be two separate ones (i.e. spirit and nature, form and matter, real and ideal, body and mind), but in the sense that the one as such is ambiguous. The philosophers who most brilliantly have pursued this idea are precisely the German Idealists, who followed in the wake of Kant's critical philosophy. Of particular interest here are the philosophies of Schelling and Hegel, who, despite their differences, had common ground in a certain notion of dialectics that can be expressed by the notion that *Identity is the identity of identity and difference* (Hegel, Werke II, 39; Werke V, 74; Schelling, AotW, 63).

This basic ontological claim means that the whole, which as we recall is the truth, cannot be put to any final formula. Not even the whole itself will serve as a description of the whole – it does not fit itself – exactly because being itself does not fit itself. The consequences for the disciplines of particular metaphysics are radical. There is no coherence to the subject in psychology. There is no coherence to the world in cosmology. There is no coherence to God in theology. While these are important claims, it is imperative that the point about the lack of coherence is not simply understood as an effort to deconstruct these disciplines. It is the crucial point of metaphysics to conceptualize this incoherence as such,

not in order to overcome metaphysics, but instead to further it. This means, however, that metaphysical enquiries should be understood in a particular way. Most importantly, it means that metaphysics cannot be an ahistorical discipline. If there is no *a priori* coherence in being, subject, world or God, then these notions must undergo some kind of historical change. While philosophy on one hand is characterized by the search for the totality of a system, it is also 'its own time captured in thoughts' (Hegel, *Werke* VII, 26).³

This idea about the conflation of metaphysics and history is helpfully ambiguous in the sense that on one hand it expresses the notion that any time has its own metaphysics, and on the other hand sets a task for philosophy (or what I shall here term metaphysics as 'last philosophy'). If the basic truth about being is that it is a notion of incoherence and lack, then history in turn could be described as a development that takes place as we try to fill the gap that is thus opened. The metaphysics of any given time will therefore be the particular way in which it tries to close the gap in being. As Schelling is keen to observe, there is nothing which disturbs human beings as much as inconsistencies and contradictions (see, e.g. Schelling, *AotW*, 28; *SW* VIII, 219). Metaphysics in the traditional sense was precisely the theoretical endeavour that sought to overcome all such disturbances. Whether it in some way conceptualized the notion of being, subject, world or God, this form of metaphysics typically tried to install one specific theoretical entity as being completely free of internal contradictions, and thereby as the thing which should be able to guarantee the consistency of other beings.

Rejecting this notion of metaphysics does not, however, mean that metaphysics as such is rejected. One can set another task for philosophy or the science of metaphysics, namely to investigate the specific ways in which a particular time, that is, its own time, deals with the fundamental lack at the core of being. Does it always take the shape of postulating the specific thing which can fill the gap? In which ways does this filling function? Can it be done correctly? Can it be overdone? It is with the task of approaching such questions that the investigations of the present work set out.

The metaphysic of our time

So what are these times in which we live? Remaining still at the level of sweeping generalization, it has often been said that the twentieth century was one that

fundamentally changed our perspective of ourselves and the world we inhabit. During this century, it gradually became clear that no thing, God or idea could fill the gap in being. As the story of postmodernism goes, History became histories. There is no longer one all-encompassing tale about humanity that each individual must find a place in. Postmodernism is characterized, as Jean-François Lyotard put it, by 'incredulity towards metanarratives' (Lyotard 1984: xxiv). The 'grand narratives' of religion, politics and spirit were discredited through the critique of metaphysics, and the ideological disasters of the twentieth century.

The crucial point here is that even after the announcement of the death of God, we should not just yet hasten to announce the end of metaphysics. A common reaction, to the condition Lyotard described, became to assert the individual narrative as the only legitimate measure of validity. Each person has his or her story. The most basic right after the fall of the great narratives of the just and equal society was therefore widely held to be the right to narrate about *oneself*.

The crucial consequence of the developments of the twentieth century was therefore the introduction of one last theoretical entity to fill the gap in being: the individual. Not the infinitely capable universal man of modernity, who triumphantly set out to shape the world in his own image, but the finite individual – everyday man. In this way, the end of the grand narratives became a grand narrative in its own right; after the metaphysics of God, Nature and History, we were given the metaphysics of *finitude*, to borrow a term coined by Alenka Zupančič (Zupančič 2008a: 43ff.). She writes:

The range of this metaphysics of finitude is considerable; it stretches from very complex and highly elaborate philosophical enterprises to an utterly commonsense 'psychotheology of everyday life', [...] in which finitude appears as consolidation for, and explanation of, our little (or not so little) disappointments and misfortunes, as a new Master-Signifier summoned to make sense of our ('acknowledged') senseless existence, as a new Gospel or 'good news': You're only human! Give yourself a break! Nobody's perfect! (Zupančič 2008a: 48)

From Heidegger's destruction of metaphysics to Derrida's deconstruction, from Adorno's negative dialectic to Habermas's discursive reason, in most forms of American philosophical pragmatism, and in most forms of French post-structuralism, a common trend has been the idea that one should refrain from making the grand metaphysical gestures of the infinite and the absolute. And most often there was the explicit or implicit conclusion that one should instead seek truth (and only with a minor *t*) in the finite realm.

The crucial metaphysical point that is being made here is that metaphysics never simply produced the Truth with a capital T. It is not the case that there once was a coherent God above, a complete world below and a coherent subject acting somewhere between them; nor is it the case that these grand narratives suddenly became false at a certain point in history. Instead, metaphysics was always structured around a gap in being. The term 'metaphysics', in so far as it is taken to denominate a specific story about the fundamental structure and coherent ground of the whole, should always be taken to describe the reaction of a specific time, a concrete historical formation, to the fundamental metaphysical incoherence; all grand narratives were stories told in order to help us forget that there can be no coherent grand narratives.

This point throws important light on the idea of the end of all grand narratives. This so-called end cannot be seen as a radical change in the *way* stories are being told; it does not mean that narrations are no longer 'grand'. Rather, it means that the fundamental impossibility of coherent narration itself has become the theme of the narration. The metaphysics of finitude is the curious formation that takes place at this precise moment where the notion that God is dead becomes a part of the commonly accepted narratives. Instead of a disappearance of the grand narratives altogether, the narration of finitude was turned into the last overarching grand narration.

The result is that a paradoxical move is undertaken in the metaphysics of finitude. It consists in telling the story of the end of all grand narratives, in order to *hide* the fact that there cannot be any coherent grand narratives. In this way, the metaphysics of finitude is a grand narrative hiding in plain sight. It is accomplished exactly by installing a lack – of coherence and order – to cover the lack that is found at the core of every coherent order. In the metaphysics of finitude the human subject finds comfort in the idea that there ultimately is nowhere, one can find comfort. There is only this very simple human existence, which can never aspire to anything universal, infinite or absolute.

It is in this specific historical situation that we must evaluate the metaphysical functioning of terror. From the perspective of the finite individual, who is living under the absolute rule that there must be no absolute rules, the terrorist immediately sticks out as an *excess*. The terrorist, as he is known by the finite individual, is the one who is willing to sacrifice both his own life and the life of others, for some kind of overarching universal cause. This is a completely incomprehensible move to the everyday man of the metaphysics of finitude, because while this individual is certainly willing to kill, he can only accept killing

if it is done with reference to, and reverence, for finitude. In the metaphysics of finitude, it is quite acceptable to invade other countries, but only if it is done to combat those who aspire to challenge this metaphysics – that is, the terrorists, fundamentalists and fanatics of the world.

Terrorist killings, on the other hand, are by definition excessive from the point of view of the metaphysics of finitude, not because they are excessively violent, but because they appear to be in direct confrontation with finitude. Not only because the terrorists seem to adhere to the type of universal cause which the metaphysics of finitude prohibits, but also because terrorism seems to target precisely the finite individual. One thing that is repeated again and again about the terrorists of today is that they are targeting and killing innocent people with no relation at all to their terrorist cause. Accordingly, the story of the terrorist threat is a story about a potential threat against anyone and everyone. Not because of the capacity of every one of us to pose a threat against the cause of the terrorists themselves – whatever it may be – but simply because of the capacity of everyone to die. The understanding of terrorism which arises under the sign of the metaphysics of finitude is exactly a threat against the very thing which is positioned at the centre of this metaphysics itself: the finite individual. What better guarantee could one find for the validity of the idea that ‘I am really and fully an individual, than the idea that there is someone out there looking to destroy ‘me’? In these ways, the excess of terrorism fits the lack at the core of the finite individual like an ideological glove.

This understanding of terrorism as excess will play a crucial role in the present investigations. As a result there is one possible misunderstanding which should be settled from the start. With the predicate ‘excess’, I do not seek to describe a form of excessive violence, which is often associated with the term. As we will come to see, the physical violence of terrorism is in general not at all excessive. Instead, the excess of terrorism should be understood as a specific way in which the concept works in language. For finitude, ‘terrorism’ is a concept that is overloaded with meaning – it means too much, it is meaningfulness-as-excess.

This very brief characterization of our own time provides no conclusions, but it does set a target for our investigations. What we should be searching for, in order to deepen our understanding of the times in which we live, is the metaphysics inherent in the ways in which we relate to terror. Especially, we should take care to notice the lacks and excesses which emerge in this regard.

The concepts of terrorism and politics

Since metaphysics is tied to its own time in the way I describe, it is surely also a political science. That is all the more so here, as we are dealing with an exemplary case of a political concept. If anything, it is terror that would today be the political concept par excellence. As a famous proverb goes, 'one man's terrorist is another man's freedom fighter'. This is an idea, which has been propagated by many, with great enthusiasm (see, e.g. Rees 2005), and which has been scorned upon by equally many (see, e.g. Netanyahu 1986). What is important to note about this point, as it is made here, is that it is not meant to introduce a moral relativism – I do not simply wish to say that it all adds up to the same in the end. The point which is assumed from the start is rather less ambitious; I simply observe that the concepts of terror and terrorism themselves are sites of intense political struggle.

In this regard the historical development of the concepts is of some interest. The concept of terror has quite a long history, but it was during the French Revolution, with the *regime of terror*, that the concept rose to the prominence it enjoys today in our political vocabulary (Walther 2004: 336ff.). It is of course particularly interesting to note how the concept of terror at this time was given a distinctly positive meaning. Especially, Robespierre has become famous for the position, made clear in a speech from the 25th of December 1793, that 'terror is nothing but justice, prompt, severe and inflexible' (see Walther 2004: 345–6). The concept of terrorism on the other hand was not coined until after the end of the Jacobin rule, where it was introduced to condemn the past and as a useful way of rhetorically defaming one's political enemies (Walther 2004: 348). Since then both of the concepts have changed their positive and negative connotations several times, but in the end this process led to the situation we are in today, where terror, terrorist and terrorism in general political discourse are simply used as derogatory concepts (Walther 2004: 324, 439). Calling someone a terrorist means not only to describe him in a certain way, it also means to condemn him. This political dimension is the reason why research on terrorism has not yet been able to agree upon a common neutral definition of terror and terrorism and probably never will be.⁴ Or to put it differently, the day it is possible to say what a terrorist is, in a definitive manner, and without immediately putting oneself in a political minefield, will be the day when terrorism has lost its specific interest and meaning. Because the concepts of terror and terrorism are in this way

crucial sites of political struggle, and because it is this very struggle itself which is of interest, I do not draw any line of distinction between terror and terrorism in the investigations that follow. Instead I argue that both of them designate a political *excess*. They are precisely concepts which designate something which is simply too much. Therefore an important task to be dealt with below consists in the development of a proper conceptual framework within which we can describe and understand such a thing as an excess.

The notion of politics at stake here is very closely linked to the notion of metaphysics presented above. Politics is fundamentally about the community – where there is no community there can be no politics – but just as there can be no *coherent* system of soul, world, God and being in our notion of metaphysics, there can be no community without conflict in our notion of politics. Politics is about communities and their conflicts. This is a notion of politics, which has been intensely discussed with reference to Carl Schmitt in recent years. Chantal Mouffe has among others insisted upon the necessity of paying close attention to the *Challenge* (e.g. Mouffe 1999, 2005) posed to liberal democracy by Schmitt's idea that politics ultimately is founded in enmity (Schmitt 2007a: 26).⁵ We will get back to the discussion of Schmitt's notion of politics in the chapter on political theology below, but for now the crucial point lies simply in the link between the notion of politics as conflicting communities, and the notion of metaphysics as a systematic whole, which revolves around a crucial incoherence. It is precisely because we can claim that these two are to be viewed in this particular way, that we can make sense of a metaphysical enquiry into contemporary politics. It is because both metaphysics and politics can be seen as systems which function around a crucial and fundamental incoherence or lack that the investigations into the metaphysics of terror can and must be an investigation into the incoherent system of contemporary politics.

Metaphysics as last philosophy

The conflation of politics and metaphysics prescribes a certain degree of involvement with scientific inquiries that lie beyond the scope of traditional philosophical inquiry. This in turn necessitates a very careful consideration of what a metaphysical enquiry can at all amount to be. The present investigations are metaphysical in nature, but not in the sense of *first philosophy* that has traditionally been the understanding of metaphysics, at least since Aristotle

famously gave form to the science that deals with the notion of being as being (Aristotle 1003a). Instead, to use a term coined by Michael Theunissen, my aim is to conduct *last philosophy* (Theunissen 1991: 26).

Where first philosophy was the kind of intellectual endeavour that sought to describe being as such through a set of a priori determinable categories, which subsequently would be handed down to other sciences and human life in general, last philosophy takes up the task of investigating a metaphysical thought that is revealed through a critical engagement with other sciences, with politics, with art – in short: with historical developments at every level. Last philosophy is the form of metaphysics that becomes available to us once we have realized that there is not and cannot be any final fact of the matter regarding the question ‘what is being?’, but where we at the same time realize that there is still an important investigation to be made regarding the functioning of being in history. This means that while last philosophy gives up on the notion that the study of metaphysics can be conducted as an a priori science, it insists that the classical metaphysical questions must still be asked and answered. Even though the whole cannot be given any absolute, a priori description, last philosophy retains the whole as the ultimate object of study. But as a last philosophical endeavour this investigation is obliged to engage seriously in the concrete phenomena that are relevant to the problem at hand. Metaphysics as last philosophy is not applied philosophy. It is the polar opposite in fact. Where applied philosophy takes philosophical thinking and exports it in a sense to a non-philosophical reality, last philosophy insists that the concrete, natural, political, social, cultural (etc.) world we inhabit is already metaphysics in action. Last philosophy conducts the manoeuvre from reality to philosophy rather than the other way around.

Our investigations should therefore be divided still in a general and a particular metaphysics. But given the specific focus upon a crucial political phenomenon of our time, they should at the same time be understood as political investigations. We can thus line out the four central tasks at hand. We must construct a political ontology of terror, a political psychology of terror, a political cosmology of terror and a political theology of terror.

The political ontology of terror takes seriously the problem that there can never be given a non-political definition of terror. This is done by engaging in concrete examples of both well-known and less well-known incidents of terrorism, but that is not all. We must also consult various strands of scholarly work, journalistic articles and governmental reports on terror. This engagement with these various forms of events and texts has the dual task of showing *that*

terrorism is to be understood as a particular kind of excess and of showing *how* this excess is to be conceptualized. Prefiguring what is to follow it can be said that the excess of terror lies not with the actual terror that happens, but rather with the terrorism that could happen. The basic excessive structure of terrorism is hence one of potentiality. What is interesting to us in terms of terror is argued to be its potentiality rather than its actuality. In this precise way 'terror' always means more than whatever concrete terrorist incidents we are discussing. All discourse on terror involves a prefiguring or promise of the potential threat. It is the ultimate task of the investigating into the political ontology of terror to conceptualize this kind of excess of language. In a similar way each of the disciplines of the particular metaphysics of terror are taken up in a last philosophical manoeuvre.

1. The political psychology of terrorism deals with the way we relate to the excess of terrorism psychologically. It takes its starting point in the notion of the *Politics of Fear* that has gained a lot of currency in recent work in sociology and cultural studies on the subject matter at hand (see, e.g. Massumi 1993, 2005, 2007; Furedi 2005; Bigo & Tsoukala 2008; Closs Stephens & Vaughan-Williams 2009). From the discussion of the politics of fear it is argued that our emotional response to the excess of terror is best understood by drawing upon the ontological terms of potentiality and actualization that were introduced in the investigation of the ontology of terror. Furthermore, we will see that boredom is an often overlooked but crucially important emotion with regard to terror.
2. The political cosmology of terror deals with the political world in the time of the war on terror. This means that it takes up the discussion of the nature of war. Especially interesting in this regard is the theory of the generations of warfare that has been developed by American historian of war William Lind (e.g. in Lind et al. 1989, 1994; Lind 2001). What we can learn from the study of the history of warfare is a lesson about the ways in which space and time is transformed by the ways in which we conduct wars. We will see that there is a crucial difference between the ways in which terrorism and state militaries operate in, and indeed construct, space and time. And we will learn that this difference is again best understood by drawing upon the ontological distinction between potentiality and actualization.
3. Finally, the political theology of terror takes up the study of political sovereignty in societies that see terrorism as a crucial threat to public

safety and order. It takes up a debate about the rule of law and the state of exception that has been going on among legal scholars with great intensity since the 9/11 attack and the legal and political responses that followed in its wake (see, e.g. Scheppele 2004; Vermeule 2005, 2009; Gross & Ní Aoláin 2006; Scheuerman 2006a,b). A central figure in this regard is the aforementioned Carl Schmitt, who first coined the term 'political theology'. The political theology of terror does not deal with the religious notion of God, but exclusively with the political 'God', the sovereign who Schmitt defined in a famous way. 'Sovereign is he who decides on the exception' (Schmitt 2007b: 13). Since many of the debates about the state of the law in the time of terror relates to the question of what kind of exceptional legal measures (if any) can be legitimately used in combating the threat from terrorism, it should be no surprise that these Schmittian ideas have been a central part of recent legal debates. The argument I present is (again) that it is by introducing the concepts of potentiality and actualization that we will be able to get to the bottom of what is going on in these discussions.

This very brief way of presenting what will follow in the pages below is meant first of all to illustrate the scope of the argument and the method of making it. What I will be doing is to construct a philosophical system of utmost antiquated fashion. I will attempt to complete the move from prolegomena to systematic whole. But in doing so I will not simply proceed by way of general a priori principles and ideas, instead I will take the concrete political reality that we are facing in the time of terror and try to extract the metaphysics already at work in it. This is a precarious manoeuvre indeed. But it is the manoeuvre of last philosophy, which to my mind is the only one available to a philosophy which seeks to strive for systematicity, while at the same time insisting upon an engaged interpretation of the times, we live in.

The critique of ideology and the critique of metaphysics

This kind of philosophical project is far from innocent. Indeed, it could well be argued to be atrocious. Given the political character of the phenomenon of terror, there seems to be an obvious problem in addressing it in the language of metaphysics. From a certain political perspective, it would be claimed that such idle speculation could get in the way of the very real political action that (at least

according to that perspective) needs to be taken to stop the threat of terrorism. But from a rather different point of view, metaphysics is not only problematic in virtue of its functioning as idle speculation. Indeed, was it not the lesson of the post-structuralist theory of the latter part of the twentieth century that metaphysics as such is one of the greatest political evils conceivable? Here the core problem of metaphysics is found in its tendency towards essentialism, and essentialism in turn is equated with the political power discourse of the dominating societal position – generally that of wealthy white Western heterosexual males.

According to such a critique, what is needed is not a new metaphysics of terror, but a critique of the ideology of terror, that is, the ideology that tells us that terror is the most crucial problem facing our societies, and that we accordingly should spare no costs, be it in terms of economy, justice or human life, to fight the threat from terrorism. As much as I sympathize with the ambition of providing a critique of the ideology of terror, it will be argued that such a critique of ideology is hopelessly lost, if it does not also engage in a metaphysics of terror – only this metaphysics of terror should be understood exclusively as *last* philosophy, never as *first*. This is a point which becomes all the more pertinent as the academic studies on terrorism recently have seen the emergence of its very own specific area of formalized critique of ideology – complete with professed agenda and an international academic journal.⁶ The development of this field of research stems from a deep dissatisfaction with more traditional forms of terrorism research, which, according to the critical agenda, lack theoretical refinement and more than anything a critical reflection on the role played by research on terrorism in public discourse on the theme. Thus, typical objects of interest to this new field of research will be the articulation of crucial societal concepts in relation to the notion of terrorism, that is, how does the usage of the concept of ‘terrorism’ influence the use of concepts like Muslim, Jew, Western, woman, man, democracy, war, freedom, French, etc.?

Faced with such an agenda it is easy to see the problem one could have with a metaphysical study, such as the present one. Would not metaphysics simply result in the reification of the ideological structures that the critique of ideology is trying to combat? The answer to this problem is found in the specific approach that is undertaken here. The crucial point about the present project of metaphysics as last philosophy is that there can be no such metaphysics without a critique of metaphysics. The suggestion I should like to make in the rest of the introduction is that the right way of positing the relation between metaphysics and the critique of metaphysics can be found by following the road from Kant

to Hegel to Schelling. Each of these classic German thinkers conceived of a new way of conducting metaphysics by founding it in a critique of metaphysics. *A metaphysical thought, thus goes the wager of the present investigations, which incorporates its own radical critique of metaphysics in the manner we can learn from Kant, Hegel and Schelling, provides some invaluable and to a great extent forgotten resources in dealing with the problems of political thought that confront us at the outset of the twenty-first century.*

This way of doing metaphysics through the guidance of a radical critique of metaphysics does not only serve to reformulate the metaphysical agenda. It can hopefully also help revitalize the critical one. The problem inherent in the ideology-critical approach to the study of terror is that such an agenda tends to adopt an epistemological stance towards the ideology of terror. A typical way of studying the problems listed above would consist of a discourse-analytical study of the ways in which the concept of terrorism is constructed in public discourse. Do we generally tend to associate terrorism with certain religious ideas or racial profiles? Do we generally construct an image of terrorists as enemies of war, as criminals or as diseases that are to be exterminated? What one would typically aim to do is, in so many words, to investigate a certain field of discourse and unmask the ideology at work therein, the critical ambition being contained in the hope that once the ideological constructs are revealed as such, they will lose their power.

The poverty of this hope has been most adequately rendered by Slavoj Žižek in his early work *The Sublime Object of Ideology* (Žižek 1989), where he, inspired by Peter Sloterdijk's *Critique of Cynical Reason* (Sloterdijk 1983), describes the working of current ideology as a particular form of cynicism. What is encountered in cynicism is the paradox that even though the postmodern self-narrators know very well that their practices are based on an ideological construct, they nevertheless keep on doing what they do. Ideology incorporates its own unmasking. We already know that our political and social practices entail and to a great extent foster global inequality, oppression of women, racism, ecological catastrophes, and so on, but we still keep on acting as if we did not know. If the classic Marxist formula for ideology was 'they don't know it, but they do it', then the new cynical form of ideology would be captured in the idea that 'they know very well what they are doing, but still, they are doing it' (Žižek 1989: 28–9).⁷ In the current investigations this can be translated into the claim that we know very well that there are problems inherent in the way we relate to terror. We know very well that we are in a sense wildly overreacting, when we are dealing with