

**Life – Death – Secret – Terrorism**

*István KIRÁLY V.  
Faculty of History and Philosophy,  
Department of Philosophy,  
Babeş-Bolyai University, Cluj-Napoca*

**Keywords:** terrorism, death, denial of death, secret, oath, applied philosophy

**Abstract**

The aim of this paper is to show that terrorism is such a **usage of death** which essentially is inseparable from the secret. We could describe terrorism as the breeding ground of terror and anxiety turned into an **instrument** and evoked by death-causing, respectively by death-causing presented as constantly possible – that is: threatening – in its secret unidentifiability. For the power of terror consists exactly in the quite particular **instrumentalization** of death, as well as of man's attitude towards death – especially the instrumentalization of the fear of death. One basic and essential characteristics and aspect of this instrumentalization is the **secret**. It is exactly the secret that organizes, articulates, wraps and brings to reality terrorists as individuals, terrorist organizations, their activity, aims, instruments, members, plans and in short all their deeds. In the terrorist act exactly “this” secret blows fatally into (and often also blows up in) the public... Therefore the secret is not “one” feature or “attribute” of death-causing terrorism, on the contrary, it is the atmosphere and the horizon in which terrorism is outlined as the **mode of existence** of the being called “man” – and in which, hence, it must be considered. Consequently, the war on terrorism (too) should/must widen into a “fight” against the denial of death. A fight which should/must be fought (after all) not only and not exclusively and mainly on the secret fields, but, on the contrary, in the depth and womb of history – which becomes more and more visible in the fractures of history by means of present day terrorism.

**E-mail:** philobib@buculuj.ro

\*

Terrorism is the **usage** of **death** essentially inseparable from the secret. We could very well describe terrorism as the breeding ground of terror and anxiety turned into an **instrument** and evoked by death-causing, respectively by death-causing presented as constantly possible – that is: threatening – in its secret unidentifiability. For the power of terror consists exactly in the quite particular **instrumentalization** of death, as well as of man's attitude towards death – especially the instrumentalization of the fear of death. One basic and essential characteristics and aspect of this instrumentalization is **the secret**.

Man instrumentalized death in several ways; however, this always turns into a basic form, modality by which the living can be dominated. The instrumentalization of death, however, works and is effective time and again and exactly amid the **denial** of death. Therefore because of this – and only to this extent – it is true that: “The primary motivation of terrorists and suicidal bombers is **theological** and it consists of two principia: duty and reward.”<sup>1</sup> It consists of the usage of death instrumentalized in its denial by means of secrecy...

For terrorism cannot be understood without the secret and the instrumentalization of death – which presupposes and is conditioned by the denial of death! Since it is the secret that organizes, articulates, wraps and brings to reality the terrorists as individuals, the terrorist organizations, their activity, their aims, instruments, members, plans and in short all their deeds. In the terrorist act exactly “this” secret blows fatally into (and often also blows up in) the public...<sup>2</sup> Because of this it is so “difficult” for the public to defend themselves against it.

If not in this sense strictly, but essentially this is what Jürgen Habermas formulated in his discussion with Giovanna Borradori regarding the interpretation of the September 11, 2001 terrorist attack.<sup>3</sup> For, he said, the so called “war on terrorism” is waged against an actually **unknown** enemy... Jacques Derrida too said in an interview published in

---

<sup>1</sup> Patrick Sookhdeo, *Să înțelegem terorismul islamic* (Understanding Islamic Terrorism) Oradea, Făclia, 2006, p. 136. (Emphasis mine I. K.V.)

<sup>2</sup> Since terrorists “want” to kill as many and as important/well-known people as possible and “want” this act to be communicated to as many people as possible in the most vivid and effective manner.

<sup>3</sup> See Giovanna Borradori, *Filosofia într-un timp al terorii – Dialoguri cu Jürgen Habermas și Jacques Derrida* (Philosophy in the Age of Terror – Dialogues with Jürgen Habermas and Jacques Derrida), Bucharest–Pitești, Paralela’45, 2005, p. 58.

the same volume, that: “We do not really know what we are speaking about when we talk about September 11.”<sup>1</sup>

To this we must only add – in order to make the matter clearer – that the enemy of the war on terrorism is “unknown” not only and not primarily in the sense as something which – either because it has been neglected or because it is a novelty – has not been “investigated” yet... but in the sense that it is **essentially** an enemy which organizes himself exactly **against** the possibility of being known or identified. Namely, in secret and with the secret.

Consequently: a quite special and, at the same time, essential relationship must be created and must operate between secret and death in terrorism – that is, in the mechanism of this particular usage of death – so that this could exist at all and that it could really “operate”. Because killing is not “an aim in itself” for a terrorist – in contrast to a person running amok –, he expressly **uses** death and the special weight, power and stress of this usage is conferred by the secret connected to it constitutively. For the secret is not “one” feature or “attribute” of death-causing terrorism which its experience and interpretation meets somewhere afterwards abandoning and superseding it... on the contrary, it is the atmosphere and the horizon in which terrorism is outlined as an *existential* – that is, as the **mode of existence** of the being which is after all usually called “man” – and in which, hence, it must be considered.

The secret leaves its mark on the organization of terrorism, it protects the plans of terrorist actions, their most detailed parts, as well as the modes in which they are carried out, and the participants – and often the culprits too; furthermore, it has the role to ensure their success. Therefore the secret actually produces, keeps in “life”, moreover strengthens – with its invisibility, unidentifiability etc. – the terror of (death)threat too.

Thus terrorism and terrorists existing-operating in secret and by means of the secret cause, deal out death. The difference between a terrorist and a conspirator – who otherwise also exists in secret and by means of the secret – is that, on the one hand, conspirators’ targets and victims always determine persons and their positions, and that, on the other hand, the conspiracy is usually aimed directly against (existent) power, against it, but its aim is to seize power expressly and directly.<sup>2</sup> In

---

<sup>1</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 135.

<sup>2</sup> For further commentaries on conspiracy see our study entitled *Az összeesküvés – Titok és eskü* (Conspiracy – Secret and Oath), in: István Király V., *Határ – Hallgatás – Titok* (Boundary – Silence – Secret), Kolozsvár, KOMP-PRESS,

contrast to this, the terrorists' targets are usually innocent people who are in no direct contact with the actual decision making mechanisms.<sup>1</sup> Consequently, the terrorist act cannot have for an aim and direct result the "taking over" or obtaining of power.

The relationship between the secret and terrorism is therefore *sui generis* and furthermore extremely ramified. Such a short analysis can naturally outline only some decisive aspects in order to attract the attention of future researchers. Since we have to examine and possibly answer some essential aspects of the question: how is terrorism **possible** existentially – that is, **actually as a mode of existence!** – ? Namely: how is it possible that well-determined, but in most cases unidentifiable people murder other undetermined, but identifiable people in systematically outlined and surprisingly **successful-effective** – often self-destructive – acts?

For it is a great question whether it is really enough to mention religious, nationalistic or political fanaticism in order to sketch and "understand" such a thing. And, if it would seem to be "enough" to mention all these, we could not disregard that **if it were not for the secret**, all these fanaticisms would not in fact succeed or erupt as "terrorism", but as something completely different; namely, they would be something else!<sup>2</sup>

---

Korunk Baráti Társaság, 1996, pp. 167–195. and Chapter VI of our book entitled *Fenomenologia existențială a secretului – Încercare de filosofie aplicată* (The Existential Phenomenology of the Secret – Essay of Applied Philosophy), Bucharest–Pitești, Editura Paralela '45, 2001, pp. 229–247.

<sup>1</sup> The victims' only crime is that by paying their taxes, by their votes, ideas and views on the world in some way, nevertheless, support the power "inimical" from the terrorists' point of view. One has to provoke such reactions by means of terror that these people – using the same tools (namely votes etc.) – might influence the decision-making bodies and processes in the directions wished for by the terrorists.

<sup>2</sup> Nevertheless, the degree to which the secret, secrecy of terrorism or the *sui generis* relationship between terrorism and the secret is **connected** still with national or/and different religious fundamentalisms, or, in other aspects, with the psychological particularities-pathology of terrorist persons and terrorism and with their study, cannot constitute the theme of this investigation if only because the lengthiness of such a discussion. After all, countless erudite studies have been and are written on these subjects, while this constitutive relationship between terrorism and the secret is scarcely raised with thorough theoretical exactingness. Consequently, the secret does not even figure in an otherwise high quality synthesis dedicated to "the psychology of terrorism", which even presents the

Like terrorism, in fact the secret is also a mode of existence, moreover, a quite complicated and little understood mode of existence. Namely, the secret is primarily **secreting**, respectively the **existentiality** of the co-original and derivate, as well as generated structures related to secreting. Therefore the secret is in fact a **secured and restricted disguising** – in accordance with my former analysis and outlining of the phenomenon of the secret. This exposure, as such, is constructed expressly **against** its own discovery, revealing. We do not know the secret (secrets) because it is disguised – and in a restricted, secured way disguised –, and this means that everything which is a secret is necessarily constructed by erecting actual obstacles, barriers, blockages – from invisibility through appearances to all kinds of interdictions – in an openly planned and projected way **against** its discovery and “unauthorized” acquisition.

By means of the secured disguise the secret’s *existential*, mode of existence is organized consequently and in fact against the **public** in general. Of course, taking into consideration exactly the public – or a determined part of this –, and exactly as the – restricted or general, but special – authority, disposal, power and domination over this. And this authority, disposal, power, domination over the public is characterized by the fact that it operates by the – theoretical – **exclusion** of the public, and expressly **in this exclusion itself**. This naturally confers to the secret a particular power, efficiency and success as well, both on a factual – purposefully in what regards the fruitfulness of the secret – and a **symbolic** level.

---

statistics of the most frequent criteria used in the definitions of terrorism [Cristian Delcea: *Psihologia terorismului – Studiu psihologic asupra teroriștilor* (The Psychology of Terrorism – Psychological Study on Terrorists), Cluj-Napoca, Editura Albatra, 2004, p. 18.] Nevertheless, the question is formulated whether the psychological theory of terrorism can scientifically explain how and why “terrorists are born” (*Ibid.*, p. 26.). Of course the result of the serious analysis is, however, that: “It seems that psychologists agree in the fact that there is no specific psychological attribute which could describe terrorists or any other ‘personality’ which is destructive – could be used for destruction (the comment is mine – I. K. V.) – for terrorists” (*Ibid.*, p. 108.). It is important to clarify all these things lest we should believe that there could be no fanatical (ideological or national) terrorism – leading even to suicidal attacks – in Christianity for example. The Irish and Basque terrorists, the events of the recent Yugoslavian wars which did not always lack religious aspects, can offer sufficient warning in this respect (too).

For symbolically, the secret **is** exactly **in** the public. Nevertheless, it is obviously there as a secret. And the symbolic power of the secret consists of the fact that it can use that against which it was created and against which in fact exists – sometimes even making this its accomplice – being present as a secret. This meaning that it can use the public symbolically as well. First of all, it “informs” the public of its existence – as a secret and exclusively as a secured secret.<sup>1</sup> The public is informed that there is e.g. inquisitional court, secret political police, that there are secret – even terrorist – organizations etc. Meanwhile these exist in fact in secret, which means that the public can never **openly** know what, how and when they are going to do. Therefore, it is a defining, essential and organic aspect of terrorism that it is, on the one hand, a **secret** violence, on the other hand a death-causing violence **striking into the public**, which, by means of its determined acts and beyond these as well, as a permanently caused and maintained terrorization, fear and dread, means, signals and threatens with – a secret, therefore inscrutable and unidentifiable – **public danger**.<sup>2</sup>

The secret always requires one or more **secret makers**, who create and operate it, and who meanwhile necessarily keep it – in secret. They are therefore the owners of the secret and of its power – as well as of its weight and pressure. They are those who by means of the secret are, and through whom the secret is: **powerful**.

This raises the unavoidable question: How far does the power of the secret reach? Has this power any **limits**, and, if it has, what kind of limits are they? Are they only pragmatic or categorial limits instead? These questions can be answered only if we make a digression starting with an idea we formulated above.

The secret, in order to be operational, must be necessarily kept as a secret, and its preservation be – continuously – ensured. For this reason the **communication** referring to the secret is peculiar. Since the secret – in every respect and direction, at least self-evidently and primarily – can be communicated, acquired **as a secret and in secret**. That is, in the case it is – effectively or symbolically – **diffused**.

This means first of all that the secret can be communicated, diffused as a secret only if its **future preservation** is **previously**

---

<sup>1</sup> Let us remember that in many respects – among other things – this was/is the source of the terrifying-attracting power of the Inquisition, secret political polices, secret societies – e.g. freemasonry – etc., and of the terrorist organizations as well.

<sup>2</sup> See also Cristian Delcea, *op. cit.*, p. 17.

**guaranteed.** This – and the primary (mainly ritual etc.) aspects which surround it – is what we call in fact **initiation**.<sup>1</sup> Secondly, the initiation must offer previous guarantees first of all against **betrayal**.

We can only really understand betrayal if we perceive it **not** as the revealing of the secret, but exactly as the **communication** of the secret **in** (the) **secret as well**. For betrayal is in fact the (secondary-derivate) communication, transmission – in secret – of some secret-contents belonging to determined secret-structures to **other, opposite** secret-structures.<sup>2</sup> Consequently and in brief: any secret can be betrayed, surpassed in secret without being ever expressly disclosed. (To **disclose** or to **break** a secret are essentially different from this, since these acts bring the secret and its contents to the public sphere, and thus destroy its existence. A secret disclosed, made public is no longer a secret!)

Regarding its existential structure the secret is **a danger to itself**, being able to consume itself. And it is exactly against this must/should that the initiation – which means the primary communication of the secret as a secret – offer guarantees. For this reason does each initiation ritual contain a – compulsory – promise which obliges the initiated to the keep the secret in every respect, namely: **an oath**.

The oath required, obtained and taken during the initiation is naturally a **secret oath**,<sup>3</sup> in which the oath taker obligatorily and previously swears to keep – first of all to conceal and be silent about – the secret in the **future**.<sup>4</sup> The oath is an assurance and security measure first of all as the guarantee for a commitment securing the secret against

---

<sup>1</sup> Regarding more details on initiation see our study entitled *Beavatás, hallgatás, álarc* (Initiation, Silence, Mask) in our volume entitled *Határ – Hallgatás – Titok*, op. cit., pp. 134–153.

<sup>2</sup> This characterizes, by this can be understood, for example, the existential structure of spying.

<sup>3</sup> On oath and secret oath see a more detailed discussion in our study entitled *Az összesküvés – Titok és eskü* (Conspiracy – Secret and Oath). *Ibid.*

<sup>4</sup> The oath gives special weight, stress and basis to the human acts it accompanies, since its inner tension, impetus and dynamism takes the oath taker beyond the direct, respectively incidental meaning of his acts. Because of this the **future** has a particular emphasis in the temporality of the oath. The future of the oath is always anticipatory. And “to anticipate” means: to take before, to act in advance. This means going forward in “time” and taking, assuming the results, consequences of present actions. See also Rudolf Hirzel, *Der Eid – Ein Beitrag zu seiner Geschichte*, Leipzig, Verlag von S. Hirzel, 1902, pp. 152–171.

betrayal, which is a threat – a threatening possibility – opening in and from the secret itself.

The secret oath is the step, the existential gesture, ontological bridge and mechanism through which the **transition** from the “profane” sphere to the initiated, from the public sphere to the secret, takes place. Its secrecy, firstly, completes the oath as an act of public validity extending it to the limit, secondly, it also means the actual **surpassing** of this (public) validity towards a “sphere” – the secret – in which the public regulators are only incidentally, functionally and instrumentally “valid”. Therefore in the secret not only any secret “becomes” surpassable – in betrayal, respectively in its inner and categorial-structural possibilities, which are born in spite of any initiation-like prohibition – , but first of all any public regulation and/or regulator as well. Consequently, by means of initiation there is a way not only to the material contents of the secret, but also to the acquisition of that entirely inner **power**, which **carries** the secret **over** the validity of any regulator (norm, value, content and prohibition) from an existential, theoretical and ontological point of view. Therefore in secret and by means of secret actually any – secret **or** public – regulation, norm, value and/or prohibition can be surpassed.<sup>1</sup>

But this also means that decisive aspect which the secret in itself – first of all as a technique and instrument, but basically with respect to its categorial structure – is **not enough** guarantee to assure, enforce its preservation, operation etc.

Despite this – and exactly as a result of this – a **new** Being-here, a **new** “subject”, a **new** secret maker – a **new** “man” – is born in the initiation. Namely, the initiation is at the same time a **re-personalization** which, through and besides establishing a relationship with and committing oneself to the secret, means and provides an overview on and the acquiring of the categorial power of the secret itself, therefore an existential inclusion in it. And this inclusion in the secret has **repercussion** to the **entire** existence and the entire – **new** – ontological identity of the initiated person. This re-personalized new identity thus essentially originates from the secret and is outlined and divided by

---

<sup>1</sup> This is why jurisprudence and legislation cannot handle the secret. Referring to this see also: Michel Coüetoux; Fortuné di Ruzza; Jérôme Dumoulin; Jean-Jacques Gleizal: *La justice face aux fonctions sociales du secret*, Grenoble, Ministère de la Justice, Service de Coordination de la Recherche, I.R.E.P. – Université des Sciences Sociales de Grenoble, 1981, p. 207.

means of the secret.<sup>1</sup> Its force and consistency therefore originate from the power of the secret, and from its promise, obligation and ability to meet the requirements and imperatives of this power.

In spite of this – as we have seen – the secret is **not enough** guarantee to assure, enforce its preservation, **operation** etc. For this reason in the initiation – in particular in the oath connected to it –, which is the guarantee of the keeping and safe operation of the secret, the horizon of this safety, respectively the actual limit of this horizon can only be the limit of the **being** – the initiated himself – who has been included thus in the secret. And this limit is – and can be – none other than **death, the being's death**.<sup>2</sup>

Thus the initiatory oath takes away from death its certain, but undetermined “when” – and in most cases even its “how” as well<sup>3</sup> –, outlining, concretizing death – on the one hand – expressly in relation to the betrayal of the secret: “...**when** I reveal the secret, or when I break my oath connected to it... may I die or be killed **so** and **so**!” Usually at the moment when the initiation-swearing act connected to the secret **goes astray**, proves to be **unfaithful** to itself, its promises. Which means: though the initiatory oath explicitly specifies the how and the when of death, it presents **life** – the oath taker's life – as something non-whole, therefore non-real originating from his faithlessness. In terrorism and the initiation connected with it, however, – on the other hand – death is pictured as a fulfilment, the carrying out to death of the mission taken on with an oath, and exactly with the goal to redeem the life of “others”.

---

<sup>1</sup> For this reason the so called “psychological” aspects of this, though “real” in each case, essentially can only be derivative, therefore secondary. This means that the – quite trendy – observations and studies on the “psychology of terrorists or terrorism” are also mainly such.

<sup>2</sup> Similarly, the **public** oath – which nowadays tends to lose its importance – as well is an act which validates the oath taker's life and aims at its actuality. The relational situation of this act – with regard to the possibility of **perjury** –, by anticipating the possibility of degradation, refers to the **entirety** of the oath taker's life. But it does not present this life as a whole to be looked at from the perspective of the end – which means, in its referentiality to death, expressly thematizing death.

<sup>3</sup> For this reason figures death necessarily – and not as an emphasis originating from elsewhere – in the curse clause of secret oaths as well. In the majority of such curse clauses death is concretely mentioned: in case he would break his oath the oath taker calls death upon his head, moreover he tells the mode of the death as well, “may I be quartered”, “may I be killed with the dagger on which I swear” etc. In more detail see: *Az összesküvés – Titok és eskü*, ibid., pp. 184–185.

Anyway: the person who takes a – necessarily secret – oath to keep and operate the secret offers/can offer as an **actual** guarantee of his faithfulness only the interruptible **non-whole** of his **own life**. This is, of course, as we have mentioned, true to terrorism as well.

For this reason the possibilities of the secret's **success** are two-fold. The first is the alternative of the "either-or": the successful mastery of either death or life – surpassing death and its threat referring to the secret, the secret maker (surviving the threat). This is victory "over death", over the explicitly formulated death threat and the dominion over life. This "either-or", however, is not an alternative which opens "on the way" and becomes more and more clearly outlined as one is getting nearer to the goal, but it stands at the end of the road from the beginning, from the moment one is included into the secret. The second alternative is also success over life, but one which leads through death-causing; a – from every point of view deathly – success which (suicidally) denies death (at least) with reference to the secret and the secret maker (too). By this the initiation-like secret vow presents the oath not only in its – truly universal, therefore exceeding the authority of any public and secret regulator – legislative quality, as a source of rights, but also as something from which the "rights" of **disposing over life and death** originate from. Consequently, the **omnipotence** of the secret manifests itself in the initiatory indrawal, insight and commitment to the categorial power of the secret.

With this, however, we have got a general outline of the ground on which we can to some measure answer the questions we asked above: How far does the power of the secret reach? Has this power any **limits**, and, if it has, what kind of limits are they? Has the secret – existentially – only pragmatic or categorial limits instead?

The analyses we have made afore clearly suggest that existentially the limits of the secret are primarily **not** categorial, but **pragmatic**. That is, they consist of the mode of its usage – dedication and determinedness, awareness related to it, respectively "expertise" in it. This does not mean that the secret has no categorial limits (as well). For we have just seen this related to betrayal. Obviously, all this can be applied and utilized in the contemporary fight against terrorism, for it is obvious that we can fight – openly, "directly" and to some measure effectively – against the secret of terrorism only with the rather polysemous and many-edged instrument of the secret.

Meanwhile, we should know about this present terrorism, considered a global threat, that historically speaking, and in the majority

of its essential aspects – therefore with respect to the secret as well! –, it is the rather direct result and consequence of the **Cold War**, respectively of its (apparent) outcome. As its name reveals, the Cold War was a non-military contest and clash between two – otherwise incompatible – social systems, its permanent and real goal being after all and all the time the **annihilation** of the rival. For this reason the secret had a peculiar place and role in it, since the “warfare” of the Cold War did not mean the use of brute military force, but an extensive and oppressive **rivalry** extended to back countries and allies.<sup>1</sup> In this warfare, socialism for example – for the first time in history – really centralized and totalized the secret and the category of secrets.<sup>2</sup> But the hottest front of the Cold War was the Third World.

Present day terrorism – identified as a global threat – (too) sprouted in the secret fields of the Cold War, in the different countries where – in secret! – individuals explicitly called and acting like terrorists (even) now were trained, and where organizations were initiated or supported.<sup>3</sup> For this reason present day terrorism primarily is not “international” in the sense that its organizations operate in unison in several countries, but rather in the fact that – meanwhile – they bring

---

<sup>1</sup> On the relationship of the Cold War and the secret see in more detail our study entitled *Library Secret Fonds and the Competition of Societies* in the volume *Books, Libraries, Reading, and Publishing in the Cold War*, Hermina G. B. Anghelescu and Martine Poulain (eds.), Washington, D. C., Library of Congress, The Centre for the Book, 2001, pp. 185–192.

<sup>2</sup> On the relationship of socialism and the secret see our study entitled *Titok és szocializmus* in our volume *Filozófia és Itt-Lét*, Kolozsvár, Erdélyi Híradó, 1999, pp. 57–78.

<sup>3</sup> Let us consider how the secret polices of several communist countries trained or supported terrorists such as Carlos or Jasser Arafat and his organization etc., respectively that the present day number one public enemy, Osama bin Laden, was trained and helped to create his first organization by the CIA. This organization was later joined by “specialists” taught and trained by the KGB and the Mossad etc., so that there the trainees could exchange their experiences and learning. In these movements, nowadays identified as “terrorist movements”, therefore competencies connected to the secret, which otherwise – actually – nowhere and in no circumstances could be united, are gathered and “impregnate” one another in the secret. Since the official, “public” national information services – defending themselves, and functioning against one another – “can communicate” only well-determined information, and not “techniques” and structures to one another.

together and profit by the competencies of several national secret services.

However, present day terrorism is not simply the “consequence” of the Cold War, but at the same time the way in which this grasps the secret *sui generis* for itself: seeing and showing it omnipotent, as the master of life and death.

The terrorism and the terrorist existing-operating in secret and by the secret therefore cause and deal out death, while the terrorist himself often dies. He commits suicide or is killed. But DOES the suicide or liquidated terrorist really DIE? And DO the victims “punished” by terrorism really DIE? Or do they rather MOVE BEYOND? The Islam terrorist departs to his heavens – to others’ hell –, and his victims too – depending on the point of view – move to their heavens, respectively others’ hell. Actually none DIES really; losing their lives, they pass instead to a – never indifferent, either salutary or damned, but nevertheless – eternal life.

At any rate, terrorism (too) – as the actuality of the dominion over life and death – can hardly be imagined without the instrumentalizing **denial** of death and dying. The instrumentalizing denial of death, dying in terrorism happens mainly and mostly, as we have mentioned above, by means of the radicalization of very traditional cultural – usually, but not always religious – bases and premises. On the basis therefore, that the denial of death has become a fundamental historical characteristic of “culture” refined to a “function”. Secondly, however, by the fact that – amid the specific instrumentalization of death – terrorism wishes to give some special, **determined sense** to dying, especially to the terrorist’s (own) possible or actual dying.<sup>1</sup> A sense by which this – also as a possible or actual dying – will become exemplary and memorable at the same time. That is, it “outlives” the dying person – who can and wants to “survive” **not** through his life, but instead through

---

<sup>1</sup> This of course does not mean that death and dying could not be “given” some determined sense at all. For this happens for example in every heroic death as well. But we should understand that, basically, on the one hand, every sense in human life originates – non-thematically – from death, respectively mortality (for without this the importance of senses would be meaningless!), and that, on the other hand, by such things the circle of “meaningful” deaths, and of those which should be considered as such is unauthorizedly and artificially constricted. For people die from different causes and in different ways day by day, but – fortunately – there is not a given cause and occasion for heroic death day by day...

his dying – expressly and directly as dying. Because of this reason, this is in fact the denial of death. For this dying is not really heroic, – even if we speak about profane, atheistic (“god-less”) terrorism – only sacrificial. The assailant differs from his victim insofar as he is the sacrificer – the one who sacrifices others –, but he is also self-sacrificial, sacrificing himself as well. The weight of his sacrifice, self-sacrifice lies essentially and exactly in the actual and factual denial of death, (his) dying, namely **the existential facticity**, the definiteness of this **denial – as denial**. In other words, in the negativity of the denial, in the active and articulated actuality of this negativity (in the “positivity” of death-causing). Terrorism instrumentalizes, uses and dominates death in these occasions **by means** of this denying actuality.

The terrorist’s “death” is therefore such – respectively that – life-losing which – according to him and for him! – directly and expressly ensures his existence **beyond life**, in other words the non-death, the non-dying, the non-passing. His victims’ death, the interpretation and interpretedness of this – beyond the fact that they are directly the victims of the terrorist act –, on the other hand are committed to the rolling and expanding waves of terror caused, surrounded and magnified by the effective contribution of the secret. Which means, that death and dying are instrumentalized – by means of the secret which got to dominate the disposal over life and death – on the grounds of the denial of death, and intertwined with the denial of death.

Psychologists, anthropologists, etc. experience and interpret the denial of death as a “basic human need”,<sup>1</sup> as a defence against death – mainly against its pressure and the anxiety caused by its actuality (mortality salience) –, by which people try to manage the terror caused by the threat of death, in other words, the terror of that with which they

---

<sup>1</sup> This is a very dynamic and ramifying – anthropological, psychological, sociological etc. – field of study launched and fertilized mainly by Ernest Becker’s successful book entitled *The Denial of Death*, published in 1973. See also Daniel Liechty, “Reaction to Mortality: An Interdisciplinary Organizing Principle for the Human Sciences”, *Zygon*, 1998/1, pp. 45–58.; Camilla Zimmerman–Gary Rodin, “The Denial of Death Thesis: Sociological Critique and Implications for Palliative Care”, *Palliative Medicine*, 2004/18, pp. 121–128.; Joseph Bottum, “Death and Politics”, *First Things*, June/July 2007, pp. 17–29. Enikő Školka’s soon to be published study entitled *Approaches of the Terror Management and Self-Determination Theories on Defense Mechanism against Death* is a superb synthesis of the psychological aspects and literature of the theme.

are confronted by (their) experiences, moreover, referring exactly to them. This then creates and starts a series of narrow or far-reaching defensive and declining mechanisms. One of the most essential among these is the belief and idea of immortality, which, however, is confronted with actual, factic death time and again.

In this way death is turned into something which is life-loss, but not dying, while dying becomes something which now incomprehensibly and unmanageably terrorizes. Therefore it must be denied again and again.

But as we can see, in a denied death not only death, but life too loses from its weight. For life becomes something, the loss of which – in Kierkegaard's words – in fact is not deathly! Or, as Nietzsche said in another respect: man has lost far more essential things in his life, than life...

Of course, accidentally the question might occur whether **confronting** death is not man's basic need in the same measure as its denial. A basic need which is moreover, again and again, suppressed and deformed by the denial of death!

Therefore, coming back to the issue of "sense", "giving" a determined instrumentalizing sense to death means, in fact, to outline the **denial of death** – instrumentalized – amid this same denial. For this sense of death – always attempting to define it – in most cases is/gets not only **beyond** dying, but also beyond life itself. In these cases, it seems that it is not human life which, being mortal and exactly because it is mortal, permanently surpasses itself, but only the losing of life – *recte*: death – carries, can carry it "beyond" one's own dying.

One may suppose therefore that people would at least blow up – and generally kill – one another and themselves more rarely if they understood that their single life is finite, in other words: uncontinuable and unrepeatable as well; if they did not deny death, their death.

In fact, the war on terrorism (too) should/must widen into a "fight" against the denial of death. A fight which should/must be fought (after all) not only and not exclusively and mainly on the secret fields, but, on the contrary, in the depth and womb of history – which becomes more and more visible in the fractures of history by means of present day terrorism. Therefore, we should speak of far **more** and of far **more essential** things than the fact that, consequently to and amid the developments of terrorism, which has reached new dimensions since September 11, 2001, we ought to re-evaluate critically (once again) – and for the sake of a new "cosmopolitan" world order (Habermas) – the legal,

international legal and political institutions and ideas of the Enlightenment and of the age based on this.<sup>1</sup> Though, naturally, this latter issue might be of interest as well, moreover, seemingly it is more direct and accessible. But it is probably not enough.

In the “age of terror” philosophy could first of all offer a view on this to us, living people – though it cannot constrain us to look at it.

Translated by Ágnes Korondi

---

<sup>1</sup> As Habermas and Derrida suggested this in their colloquies with Giovanna Borradori. See: Giovanna Borradori, *op. cit.*