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The Psychological Resources of Terrorism According to French Philosopher André Glucksmann

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The Psychological Resources of Terrorism According to French Philosopher André Glucksmann

Dr. Nicolae Iuga [α] & Dr. Laurentiu Batin [σ]

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I. Introduction

It may seem unusual that the feeling of hatred lay at the basis of all human relationships, from the simplest relations between individuals – interpersonal relations – to the more complex ones – relations between ethnic groupsand international relations at a global scale.

Therefore, Schopenhauer postulates the Will. Kant argued that the thing itself, correlative to the phenomenon, is impossible to know. "Schopenhauer tells us however that the thing itself is the Will"[1]. For example, our body is nothing but objectified will, the will to exist. And it isn't just our bodies, but also in the entire animal and plant kingdom, even the mineral one; they are all nothing else but the objectification of a hypostasized instance. In the mineral kingdom, the will manifests as magnetism and electricity, in the plant kingdom as tropisms and tactisms and in animals and humans as sexuality and a struggle for existence. As a metaphysical principle, such a will could have been presented as an impersonal force or energy, as a "vital impetus" as Bergson coined it later. However, Schopenhauer preferred to use the Will as "the descriptive term best known to us"[2].

It was the samein the case of Freud, insofaras the psychoanalysiscompels us to go beyond the analysis technique of some psychological contents, to issues that are philosophical and principled in nature. In essays such as *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* or *Civilization and its Discontents*, Freud tackles not only the functioning of the mental activity, but has also stated his ambition to contribute to the "unlocking of life's enigma". Freud hoped to achieve this goal by presenting two fundamental forces of life, namely the instinct of life (Lebenstrieb) and the death instinct (Todenstrieb)[3]. The manifest, exteriorized life is governed by the principle of pleasure and necessity, which were known since ancient Greece, as "Eros" and "Anake"; but the hidden root of life is made up of the intertwining of two opposing and inseparable principles, which condition each other reciprocally – the instinct of life and that of death. This Freudian theory of instincts, developed in old age, surpasses the mere psychological significance, attaining an ontological dimension.

But can hatred be a universal life principle, unequivocally explaining – or at least primarily explaining – people's behavior? Is hatred a ubiquitous human presence? Is it a byproduct or is it innate? By adopting a highly exuberant, ironic and caustic style, André Glucksmann seems to give an affirmative answer. In one of his classic texts, Glucksmann unequivocally writes: "The thesis that I stand by here is that claiming that hatred exists, we've all encountered it. At the microscopic scale of individuals, as well as within large communities. The fervor to harass and destroy cannot be banished with skilled words"[4].

Traditionally, it was argued that hatred as such, capital hatred does not exist. Destructive, criminal behaviors are explained by "circumstances". The gratuitous wickedness of an individual is placed in the charge of psychiatrists or psychologists. Everything is explained, everything is forgiven understood and all is forgiven.

For example, a pedophile might be considered a victim of older abuse, of an unhappy childhood. A thief or an assassin might invoke an urgent need for money, a rapist that he is the result of a precarious education,

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[1] Frederick Copleston, The History of Philosophy, vol. VII, All Publishing House, Bucharest, 2008, p. 261
[2] Idem, p. 262
[3] Sigmund Freud, *Works,* vol. I, Scientifical Publishing House, Bucharest, 1991, p. 339 and the following.
[4] A. Glucksmann, *Hate speech,* Humanitas Publishing House, Bucharest, 2007, p. 9.

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an incestuous of promiscuity. The common feature of antisocial acts, hatred, is reduced to a variety of external causes, which some might claim precede it: poverty, humiliation, moral and physical misery, frustrations, offenses, misunderstandings, misfortunes.Although, in terms of terrorism, counter-arguments can also be found, the terrorist activity cannot be explained satisfactorily by the social misery they might be recruited from. For example, it has been noted that "the Basque Country is one of the most prosperous provinces"[5] and, despite this, it is an inexhaustible source for terrorist activities. Similarly, Islamic terrorism is financed by some of the planet's wealthiest countries, such as Saudi Arabia, which financed Bin Laden's organization, as well as other fundamentalist ones which are active in Algeria and Europe. One might rather say that "the Islamic terrorism is the result of a religious obsession, unrelated to the causes of global poverty"[6].

According to Glucksmann however, hatred exists as a psychological root, preceding the social causes of an antisocial behavior. It is comparable to the "display of the will to destroy, just for the sake of destruction"[7]. In Glucksmann's conception, like Hidegger, Care is the innate determination and the only innate human "phenomenon", all others (understanding, anxiety, curiosity, ambiguity, emotional positioning etc.) directly deriving from Care[8]. Similarly, for Glucksmann Hatred seems to be the determination, the innate human emotion. In support his thesis, Glucksmann provides proof from the entire history of human spirituality, starting with ancient Greece.

Since Homer and up till now, the ancient Greek civilization and the Latin one afterwards explored the souls of men and in the societies' mentality "the tenebrous, intimate workings of some destructive powers"[9], called by different names from one age to another and from one civilization to the other, but all subordinate to the contemporary notion of hatred. Thus, in Homer's Iliad, the poet speaks from the very beginning of the fabled "anger" (mania) of Achilles, then of the furious madness of Ajax, describing in detail the unleashing of the most violent human passions, that "primary hatred which is so difficult to explain"[10]. Things add up. King Agamemnon sacrifices Ifigenia, his daughter, to appease the gods and calm the opposing wind on the sea. This beginning, provoked by destiny and the gods, suffices for the number of manifestations of hatred and vengeance to begin. Clitemnestra, the mother of Ifigenia and Agamemnon's wife, overcome by grief and hatred, will kill Agamemnon to avenge Ifigenia's death; afterwards, Orestes, Agamemnon's son, will murder Clitemnestra to avenge his father – and so on[11].

In order to illustrate his idea, Glucksmann analyses Medea's tragedy, as depicted by the roman writer Seneca[12]. As a character of an ancient tragedy, Medea is a legendary witch from the Argonaut's cycle, daughter of the king of Colchis. When Jason, who went in search of the Golden Fleece, landed on the shores of Colchis, Medea fell in love with him. In order to help Jason obtain the Golden Fleece, Medea battles against the ferocious creatures guarding this valued item, and doesn't even hesitate killing her own brother, Absyrtos, when Jason is in danger. Afterwards, Jason and Medea take refuge in Corinth; they get married and have two sons, Mermeros and Pheres. However, after a while, Jason rejects Medea, so he may remarry, out of interest, Creusa, the daughter of Corinth's king, Creon. Humiliated, Medea offers her rival a chest with a poisoned robe and crown, which kill Creusa and burn set the royal palace on fire. But Medea's vengeance does not stop here. In order to inflict greater emotional trauma upon Jason, she kills her two sons by him, Mermeros and Pheres, in front of him – an outburst of hatred which greatly surpasses the vengeance caused by Jason's infidelity. This hatred becomes "affirmative", not "reactive"[13]. This is what makes man superior to animals, in terms of hatred. An animal may also be provoked to violence, it can be riled up etc. and it is then when it becomes aggressive. But the animal will be reactive, it will react in accordance with the given circumstances, it will not be "affirmative", i.e. capable of hatred beyond the reasons given to it. Only man is capable of a passionately organized, gratuitous hatred, for a period of time coextensive with his own life – at least that's what one can conclude from Glucksmann's overall discourse. If Bergson had defined man via laughter[14] and Huizinga via his ludic behavior[15], then we could have stated that, in the case of Glucksmann, man is defined as an animal that can hate without a reason or beyond the reasons themselves.

Glucksmann's ad-hoc conducted analysis on the Medea tragedy[16] shows us a certain phenomenology of hatred, a certain processuality of this terrible feeling's origin, by going through three main stages: (a) the pain, (b) the anger and (c) revenge. In this case, the pain (dolor) stands for self-mourning.

[5] Jean-François Revel,*The anti-American Obsession,* Humanitas Publishing House, Bucharest, 2004, p. 99.
[6] *Idem.*
[7] A. Glucksmann, *op. cit.*, p. 9.
[8] Martin Heidegger, *Being and Time,* Humanitas Publishing House, Bucharest, 2003, p. 245-247.
[9] A. Glucksmann, *op. cit.*, p. 39.
[10] *Idem*, p. 39.
[11] D.M. Pippidi, *Variations of Classical Themes,* Eminescu Publishing House, Bucharest, 1981, p. 105 and the following
[12] André Glucksmann, *op.cit.*, p. 42 and the following.
[13] *Ibidem,* p. 45.
[14] Henri Bergson, *The Theory of Laughter,* Institutul European Publishing House, Iaşi, 1992, p. 24.
[15] Johan Huizinga, *Homo Ludens*, Univers Publishing House, Bucharest, 1977, p. 70.
[16] André Glucksmann, *op. cit.*, p. 46 and the following.

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Rejected and abusively stripped, Medea stopped being just a hateful woman in Seneca's tragedy, personifying hatred manifested as a woman. In these circumstances, Medea recalls all her unhappiness, all the beatings she endured, all the injustices that happened to her. Her husband, Jason, banished her, took her children and remarried. She had to leave empty-handed, abandoning everything, her home, her family, the city. She continuously thinks of the betrayal she was subjected to, fueling her suffering. It doesn't occur to her, not even for an instant, to leave after having negotiated certain monetary compensations, but keeps on gratuitously fueling her anguish. She transforms the injustices suffered by her, at the hands of others, into self-violence. Pain and sorrow are taken to the ultimate threshold, until the loss of her social and individual identity by the heroine. Medea kills herself, symbolically, so she may be reborn under a different aspect, a vengeful one coming from beyond death.

The second element, Anger, is relentless, devastating and impersonal, "like a telluric catastrophe or the madness of a god"[17]. The anger which the one overcome by pain turns against himself is now directed against someone else, as blind rage. The angry person imposes on the world his inner emptiness. Medea has committed crimes before – she betrayed, poisoned and committed fratricide – but all these were not driven by hate, but by the love she bore for Jason. Now, it's something different, hatred replaces love; now she doesn't wish to do something good for Jason, at the cost of removing others; now she only wants to do harm, because she wishes harm on others and nothing else. The hatred of the angry person reveals in fact the secret of their strength. The person who hates has no moral limits or prohibitions, but, at the same time, they speculate their opponents who continue exhibiting moral compunction. Appealing to Creon's compassion, Medea requests and obtains from him a one day respite before leaving the city, exactly the amount of time she uses to burn and murder. Thus, "the hatred driven person obtains an edge compared to the love driven persons, who can never spot pure hatred"[18]. Hatred is more powerful than love. Love is not the prisoner of its object; the one who loves, loves something or someone, a woman, a child, fame or fortune. Instead, hatred is completely free of all ties, it is completely independent; it cares for nothing and nothing can hold it back when it means to do harm.

Finally, revenge itself is made disproportionate by hatred, in relation to the pain caused by the initial injustice, by Jason's betrayal for example, in the case of Medea. In ancient times, revenge was called *nefas*, when it was taken to paroxysm. The term *nefas* implied a lot more than a mere murder committed out of vengeance; it meant, on all levels – religious, moral, juridical – a crime accompanied by such an unusual, infamous profanation, that it exceeded the competences of the courts and the penalties provided by the codes. All taboos are suspended, all ties to the city and family are abolished; there is no turning back. Mentally insane Roman emperors such as Caligula or Nero, have committed or at least mediated such infamous acts, of such a gratuitous cruelty, that they cannot be explained in a way other than having stemmed from pure hatred. Medea kills her own sons. Atreus kills the sons of his brother and then serves them to him, for dinner. Achilles defeats Troy in a war fought according to military combat rules, but after Achilles' death, Agamemnon wipes out all of Troy's inhabitants, in an act of unwarranted cruelty, stemmed solely from hatred.

Hatred is omnipresent and omnipotent. We can detect it everywhere, spanning over centuries and millennia, in other areas and civilizations. Lenin's example is conclusive. In 1981, there was a great famine in Russia, resulting in hundreds of thousands of deaths from among the peasants. The Church, representatives of the intellectuals, writers, priests, poets, students, representatives of the tsar, all of them initiate an impressive humanitarian campaign to help those affected by the famine. In the city of Samara, the young Lenin, who was not much older than 20 years of age, was the only one to vehemently condemn, in newspaper articles, this humanitarian initiative. Even since then, Lenin's purpose was aimed at producing an immense amount of hatred within the people, which would eventually lead to a generalized outbreak of violence. "To hell with this mercy! It would be better for those muzhiks to lose their illusions, to forsake all hope in God and the Tsar; it would be better for them to see their families starving to death"[19], because this would pave the way for the outbreak of a revolution. For a better understanding of things, hatred, as a universal human feature, should be particularized. We must obtain the explanation how the transition from hatred in general to specific cases of hatred is made, from hatred against people in general to hatred against someone in particular, from hatred against humans in general to hatred against Jews, to anti-Semitism. This is Glucksmann's view on hatred, in a summarized presentation, by following Glucksmann's endeavor from literary analyses to historical facts.

At first glance, André Glucksmann's writings have two obvious features. First of all, aside from his debut book, *Le Discours de la guerre*, published in 1967, all his other books are written in an essayistic style, in the philosophical sense of the word; they are placed alongside the genre's best French works, since Montaigne and Montesquieu forth. They are books of the utmost originality, in terms of two features: the text's

[17] *Ibidem*, p. 49.
[18] *Ibidem,* p. 52.
[19] *Ibidem,* p. 56.

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literary quality and the use of irony, a vigorous, ubiquitous, sharp and corrosive irony, following a Socratic-Hegelian line. Undoubtedly, irony is a virtue of writing and a superior form of the manifestation of philosophical intelligence. But the texts of an ironic nature no longer fully showcase the argumentative apparatus of the idea; oftentimes their arguments are not explicit, but implicit, like wings grown on the interior, and the adverse argumentation is no longer entirely reiterated and disputed counter-argumentatively, in the open, but is cut down from the root, by irony turned into ridicule.

Irony, which, for the author, is precisely virtue and strength, represents a significant obstacle for person researching his work. Exemplifying with cases where irony was successfully employed is not sufficient for the research. According to its own rules, the scientific research implies an applied examination of the text and a rational understanding of the ideas and arguments in it, a critical evaluation of the ideas and the prediction of some consequences for the future cognition of the field; such demands are rendered unattainable because of the irony. The research requires the reiteration of certain narrative parts of the text which is the study subject, possibly the reproduction of some quotes, the possibility of in-depth, insightful and non-equivocal analyses. But irony cannot be narrated, cannot be didactically presented and then analyzed, without dulling out its wit. Irony has something ineffable and unique about it, like poetry. Therefore, the research of an ironic text should follow the mental reconstruction of the researched author's endeavor, in order to reach un-equivocal meanings, to emit ideas pertaining to the author; only then can the researcher divine these ideas and reformulate them in his own terminology, with inherent approximations and a less than accurate fidelity compared to the original. In short, researching ironic texts is much more difficult than researching the usual scientific texts, without the ironic quality.

Secondly, André Glucksmann also argues his political philosophy ideas with facts from the immediate reality, with examples of wars or terrorist acts, but, most of all, he argues his ideas with characters from classical literature. Thus, the mechanisms by which the frenzied hatred operates are illustrated through a detailed analysis of Seneca's ancient tragedy, *Medea*. War characterized by battle to the death is illustrated by Sophocle's*Antigone* and the nihilistic terrorism by Dostoievsky's*Demons*.

Why does Glucksmann resort to classical literature? Why would the analysis of a tragedy written two thousand and five hundred years ago be more conclusive than the contemporary historical event? This option is explained by Glucksmann himself in an extensive interview with French magazine "Le Point"[20]. Referring to contemporary facts might be more misleading than referring to classical literature. For example, when it comes to hatred, it is known that there are sociologists and political analysts that claim the terrorists' hatred is caused by external factors, by poverty, oppression, humiliation. But experience has shown us that not all poor people, not all those suffering give in to hatred. In this manner, we can take one particular case of violence, based on which we can claim, in a lawyerly fashion, one idea or its opposite, and by doing so we generate endless and fruitless disputes that have no conclusion. On the contrary, we can notice that, in most cases, modern terrorism is not represented by a single, poor, ignorant and frustrated person, but rather an individual coming from Muslim countries but educated in the West; therefore, we're talking about a person whose family has considerable financial resources, who can afford to pay the high tuition fees of Western or American universities, as well as leading an expensive occidental lifestyle. Despite all this, these people still become terrorists, risking their own lives. Thus, the cause of social evil is not misery, but intrinsic human hatred. The modern terrorist is not a puppet whose will is bent by precarious pecuniary circumstance; he is an acknowledged criminal who enjoys killing.

That is why Glucksmann mainly resorts to classical literature, because it emphasizes human typologies, fictional characters more relevant than real people. Because – as Glucksmann himself states – "literature is a science of evil"[21]. Literature reveals the evil in man and exorcises him via the catharsis effect, which was observed even by Aristotle. By highlighting evil, literature is a doorway to knowing the evil in man, that evil which is not accidental but rather constitutive and perennial to man; therefore, literature is a "science of evil". Thus, in André Glucksmann's political philosophy books we will see characters from Sophocles, Euripides, Seneca, Montaigne, Shakespeare, Dostoyevsky, Chekhov, Beckett, Ionesco revived. These great writers are not only poets, but prophets of evil as well. They reveal what goes wrong in the human drama, what is painful, they see "the flowers of evil" better than others; they can decipher more easily than others the ill omens of fate. And the fate from ancient times has been replaced with politics (as Napoleon stated) in the modern era, followed by hedonism and manipulation in the postmodern age. Writers are a permanent reminder of the danger that lurks about, the living memory of the inhumane. Let's take two other examples, alongside the one of Medea, that we have previously presented, in Glucksmann's reading.

The second example would be Sophocles' *Antigone*– one of the most valuable literary works of

[20] *Entretien avec Roger-Paul Droit,* in „Le Point", no./jeudi 4 nov. 2004
[21] *Idem*.

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ancient times[22]. The heroin was the daughter of Oedipus, king of Thebes, born of Oedip's incestuous love with his mother, Jocasta. She witnesses the fight between her two brothers, Eteocles and Polynices, who fight with all the bitterness and hatred they can muster, until they kill one another. Since both brothers died in battle, the city's throne is occupied by Creon, Jocasta's brother. The new king was, in fact, a hypocritical and brutal tyrant. He commands that a grand funeral be organized for Eteocles, a funeral fit for a defender of the city; as for Polynices, who marched with a foreign army against the city, he dictated that not even a simple funeral be held and that his body remain unburied which, according to Greek tradition, was a great crime. Antigone, on behalf of the moral conscience and of the blood bond with his brother, symbolically returns Polynice's body to the ground. When learning that she had disobeyed him, Creon goes mad with anger and condemns Antigone to death. Beyond the impressive moral complexity and beauty of the tragedy, we are left, for posterity, with two literary paradigms of hatred and limitless cruelty, inherent to man as such – the fratricidal paradigm of fight to the death and that of the cruelty with which a tyrant sentences to death a character who is the exponent of love and moral conscience. These paradigms are mainly exploited by Glucksmann in *Le Discours de la guerre*.

Finally, the third example, Dostoevsky's *Demons*, or better said the demonized, possessed by the devil, characters largely revived by Glucksmann, especially in *Dostoievski à Manhattan* and in *La troisiè mort de Dieu*. Dostoyevsky's novel is one of spiritual darkness, of anger and despair[23], of crimes committed in the name of political ideas, the author anticipating the 20th century, with its domination via the political ideology and via the lie regarding the religious faith and culture. Who are these „demons"? Well, up to a point, they are almost ordinary people: Verhovenski, Stavroghin, Kirillov or Şatov, people who seriously question their faith in God or the lack thereof, people who have socialist, anarchist and nihilist discussions. Afterwards we discover their fanatical atheism and fierce anarchism. They seem to be emanating what will be known as „terrorist nihilism", a century and a half later. They oppose aristocracy, art and religion, the Holy Trinity which these worship being: atheism, science and revolution. Their leader, Piotr Stepanovici Verhovenski, „a killer by trait and a clow by vocation"[24], is the prototype of the ideologist that will haunt the next century. Nikolai Stavroghin, a man of a high intelligence, like Ivan Karamazov, is an unfathomable abyss. He has, at one point, opportunities to repent and return to normal, but these roads are closed behind him because, as he states, he has already passed a certain „threshold of evil" from which there is no turning back.

Therefore, alongside the true paradigms of hatred from some of the ancient Greek tragedies, Medea or Creon, the tyrant from Antigone – we have Dostoyevsky's Stavroghin, in modern literature, a scary and nihilistic genius. He knows what freedom is, but he either denies or abuses it[25]. He can distinguish between good and evil, but refuses to implement it. Stavroghin feels a certain satisfaction, a real one, a certain delight in commiting a sin; he draws pleasure from being blasphemous and from self-pride. They will be his downfall, eventually. At first, Kirilov does not care whether he lives or dies. Then, he wishes to do the atheist demonstration: whoever shall overcome suffering and pain, will become God themselves – and then there will be no other God. This is the reasoning behind his suicide: to prove that God does not exist!

In conclusion, we believe it is true that, on the one hand, literature emphasizes the evil in man and exorcizes him via the "catharsis" effect, a fact noticed since Aristotle. For Aristotle (in *Poetics*, 1449b) *katharsis ton pathematon* – which literally meant "cleansing of sins" – meant that if we witness the theatrical enactment of a tragedy or if we read a literary work with a tragic topic in general, it will stir up in our soul two feelings, also called passions: mercy and fear, so that in this homeopathic way the soul may "cleanse" itself of these "sins". Why mercy and fear and not something else? Aristotle explains this in detail. In the tragic situation, the hero (the character) is punished by Destiny and dies without guilt. The hero is not killed because he, as a hero, would be evil; he is killed because Destiny is evil and unfair to him. So, the hero is categorically not evil, but it is intended for him to be at least like us, as sometimes he can be better than us. Therefore, in the face of tragedy, we will feel pity for the hero who is just like us, as we will feel fear of the hero who is better than us. Naturally, we feel pity for the one such as us, who dies without a fault and with no possibility of escaping. Fear is explained in another way. If someone who is better than us, deserved to die tragically, then what could we expect to deserve, we who are lesser than him?

However, on the other hand, in the approximately two millennia that have elapsed since the Greek tragedy to the modern novel, there have been some significant changes. Meanwhile, the place of antiquity's Destiny has been taken by Politics, in modern times, as Napoleon stated. In the theater of ancient times, the hero's destiny was a tragic, every time; in the modern novel, the tragic is just a particular case of the dramatic. The attribute of evil also shifts significantly from Destiny to the individual, to the human, to the character of the novel. We no longer have destiny's impersonal and necessary evil, but the personal and

[22] Sophocles, *Theater,* EPL, Bucharest, 1969, p. 5 *and the following*.
[23] Silviu Man, *The Demons,* www.bookblog.ro (consulted on April, 2011).
[24] Ion Ianoşi, *Dostoievski,* Teora Publishing House, Bucharest, 2000, p. 36.
[25] Silviu Man, *op.cit*., idem.

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contingent evil of a novel's hero. In literature, we no longer have only a cathartic function, but also an authentic "science of evil". We share Glucksmann's view, according to which, in some literary works, we have an authentic and useful cognition of evil and hatred, of the contemporary terrorist's profile.

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