

Fanaticism, Terrorism, Suicide Terrorism: Some Marcelian Perspectives

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Abstract: In this article, I will shed some light on the phenomenon of suicide terrorism from the perspective of Marcel. It turns out that, without being contemporaneous to this phenomenon, Marcel to some extent illuminates it by developing several highly significant notions and analyses. I am referring to notions such as “mystery,” “evil,” “problem,” “presence,” and “intersubjectivity.” Based on Marcel’s thinking, I would like to suggest that suicide terror exemplifies a state of precipitated, albeit flawed, intersubjectivity. I will conclude by drawing some lines between fanaticism, suicide terrorism and modernity. It could be argued that the latter is partly involved in its own destruction.

Introduction

“We might say that the fanatic transfers to the level of thought, or to what would be that level if it could, processes which are strictly of the body: it is, I suppose, precisely in so far as it becomes corporealized in this way that thought *is* fanatical.”

*Gabriel Marcel*¹

This article will discuss the tension in which suicide terrorism and the fanatic mind-set in which it originates are caught up. On the one hand, these phenomena seem to consist of complete self-immersion and the dismissal of any form of relation to what is rejected (the “enemy,” the “infidel”). On the other hand, other-relatedness inevitably returns. Adducing some highly interesting perspectives from the philosophy of Gabriel Marcel and his discussion of fanaticism, I will argue that suicide terrorism and fanaticism are ambiguous: they both expel the other they reject or aim to kill, deprive them of humanness, *and* find some kind of “communion” with them, albeit the *cold* community of common death. This may be due to an ineradicable structure of intersubjectivity that conditions human agency.

Turning to the philosophy of Marcel can be particularly helpful inasmuch as it will not only elucidate the conflict between rejecting and embracing the other, but, in revising the distorted concepts of “subjectivity” and “agency” enhanced by Idealism, Marcel will manage to give a more convincing picture of the ambiguities with which the fanatic agent is faced. He thereby relies on a set of notions each of which supports his account: “mystery,” “evil,” “problem,” “presence,” and “intersubjectivity.” These notions blur the prevailing subject/object distinction that still determines our average approach to many phenomena, including human actions. This distinction thrives on what Marcel calls a “spirit of abstraction” (*esprit d’abstraction*) characteristic of Modernity and generally dominating our technological world today. It treats everything as an object and neutralizes their particularities. Consequently, human beings are frequently reduced to their functions rather than treated as having an intrinsic value. Following Marcel’s premises, it could be argued that the fanatic mind—oppressing the

¹ Gabriel Marcel, *Man against Mass Society*, trans. G.S. Fraser (South Bend, IN: Gateway, 1952), p. 148 (Hereinafter *MAMS*.) (*Les hommes contre l’humain*, Paris: Fayard, 1951, p. 111; hereinafter *HCH*.)

“contemplative” (i.e., self-reflective) attitude conditioning it—can be seen as a way of “dealing” with blurred subject/object boundaries, if not as an attempt to restore them. Should it make sense to see religious fanatics as engaged in “boundary management”—but I will later show that this is only one part of the story—then the consequences would be twofold.

First, suicide terrorists and other fanatics may well be susceptible to the *same* spirit of abstraction which Marcel emphatically attributes to the modern world that they see as their enemy. If true, they would be indirectly complicit with what they are fighting against. Secondly, it can be safely assumed that what is roughly called today “Islamic suicide terrorism” will *not* be the only unlikely outcome of a technological age that intended to once and for all relieve the burdens of mankind; what is nowadays frequently termed “populism” may on its turn have a share in the fanatic mind-set of the terrorists—and ultimately be just as self-destructive. Both “Islamic suicide terrorism” and populism may have a similarity, and perhaps could be seen as stepchildren of the Age of Enlightenment. Already in the 1990s, Benjamin Barber argued that Jihadism and populism are interrelated phenomena.² Just as with Islamic suicide terrorism, populist anti-pluralism ends up in new forms of “Manichaeism.” I use term “Manichaeism” (as Marcel does) in the sense of a radical *moral* antagonism between Good and Evil. We will see that Marcel rejects any form of such Manichaeism as it is a consequence of abstract thinking.

Here, we will limit ourselves to a discussion of the first consequence, leaving the second open for further research. I will start from a single testimony—that of a Palestinian “freedom fighter’s” “farewell” address—to see if it confirms, and is confirmed by, Marcel’s philosophical approach to the topic of fanaticism. I am aware that such a confirmation cannot really “prove” anything. To the extent that it is exemplary for a genre and a particular discourse among Islamists, it will only give us some significant hints; further corroboration will always be necessary.

Next, I will consider Marcel’s approach of the fanatic mind against the backdrop of a discussion of intersubjectivity, mystery, and evil. These are important notions in Marcel’s philosophy that have one thing in common: they outdo the primacy of the subject by resituating it into a wider framework. I will suggest that this framework also applies to any perpetrator/victim relation; so much so, that *inadvertently* a new form of connectedness is brought about that goes against the grain of any *intended* “Manichaeian” subject/object divisions. I will conclude by drawing some general conclusions and offering further possible perspectives for discussion.

Needless to say, Marcel’s discussion of the fanatic mind-set had its own historical setting and, of course, Marcel himself does not engage with contemporary suicide terrorism.³ However, limiting philosophical discussions to their direct historical context would be lethal to philosophy. Marcel’s thought is still fruitful for some of our concerns today and I believe it is quite Marcelian to move beyond the confines of Marcel’s immediate background. Even more so since it is not clear that Modernity’s “spirit of abstraction” has become extinct in our twenty first century.

² See Benjamin A. Barber, *Jihad vs. McWorld. How Globalism and Tribalism are Reshaping the World* (New York: Ballantine Books, 1995.) Both are kindred responses to a globalising world, albeit from different doctrinal premises. Distinguishing between “populism” as an exclusively Western reaction to globalism, and “religious fanaticism” as typical for Muslim or Hindu countries, testifies itself to an overwhelmingly secular – if not Orientalist – perspective. Jan-Werner Müller defines populism as *antipluralism*. See his *What is Populism?* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2016), p. 20. About populism as a worldwide rather than a merely Western phenomenon, see Kosuke Mizuno and Pasuk Phongpaichit (eds.), *Populism in Asia*. Kyoto CSEAS Series on Asian Studies 2 (Kyoto: NUS Press and Kyoto University Press, 2009).

³ For some historical background, see Marcel’s autobiographical *Awakenings: A Translation of Marcel’s Autobiography* (Milwaukee: Marquette University Press, 2003); orig. *En Chemin, Vers Quel Eveil?* (Paris: Gallimard, 1971).

Suicide Terrorism, Fanatic Minds, and Manichaeism

Well before blowing himself up while being checked by Israeli security guards in the Gaza strip, Ismail Masawabi, aged 23, started his written farewell address as follows:

Thanks be to God who brings the mujahedeen's victory and the dictators' defeat, and praise be to Muhammad, the faithful, honourable Prophet Muhammad, and all his friends, and all those who have followed in his footsteps.

Dear Muslim youth the world over: I greet you with the blessed greetings of Islam; greetings that I send to all of you who fight in the name of religion and the nation; greetings to all those who are convinced fighters and martyrs.⁴

It is easy to identify the Manichaean dualism of paired concepts and notions here. On the one hand, there are "God," the "mujahedeen," "victory," "Muhammad," his "friends" and "followers," the "Muslim youth," "Islam," "religion," the "nation," and "convinced fighters and martyrs." On the other hand, there are the "dictators" and "defeat." A reading of the full address makes clear that the latter are supposed to be the Jews: "We are a nation," Masawabi states, "living in disgrace and under Jewish occupation. This happened to us because we didn't fight them; we didn't fight for God." As in "historical" Manichaeism, the world seems bifurcated, with one side being on the side of God and the other being God's enemy which enhances this bifurcation.

To those who are familiar with the history of Christian Europe from its inception, this bifurcation will be reminiscent of the Roman Church's habitual approach to heretics and infidels. Those who have read the bull excommunicating Spinoza or his predecessor, Uriel da Costa, would believe that ancient attitudes remained in the Church up to this period. However, apart from the underdog position from which the terrorist's letter was drafted, its dualism goes as far as justifying suicide, which underlines the aggravation of this dualism as compared to Platonic and Manichaean dualisms prevalent in medieval and early modern times.

In a book from 1951, *Les hommes contre l'humain (Man against Mass Society)*, Marcel interestingly discusses what he calls the "fanatic consciousness" (*conscience fanatisée*). Marcel intended to analyse the totalitarian, Hegel-inspired mind-set, whether Nazi or communist, in the broader perspective of an over-all spirit of abstraction, i.e., the tendency to avoid a concrete encounter with things and human beings, and to subsume everything under a common, abstract denominator. It is telling that the discussion of the fanatic consciousness is immediately followed, as though it were its upshot, by the famous chapter "The Spirit of Abstraction, as a Factor for Making War." It is as if the spirit of abstraction, characteristic of Modernity according to Marcel, could not fail to bring with it both *fanaticism* and *totalitarianism*, either in its essence or as "collateral damage."

In suggesting that Marcel's analysis can help us to understand the mind-set of the aforementioned Muslim "fanatic," I by no means want to imply that Modernity's predicament is epitomised only in radical Islam. Other, *analogous* forms of fanaticism are likely to be found, whether or not openly expressed, in Modernity's sphere of influence. If our reading of suicide activism through the lens of Marcel's analysis is plausible, the implications would be twofold: 1) contemporary Islamic suicide activism has *Modernity's* spirit of abstraction as *one* of its

⁴ See Christoph Reuter, *Life as a Weapon. A Modern History of Suicide Bombing*, trans. H. Ragg-Kirkby (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 2004), p. 90.

conditions of possibility; 2) a spirit of abstraction and its extreme outcome (i.e., a fanatic mind-set) are not just the outcome of Modernity; this spirit creates an *iterative* human possibility that, true, has taken a *particular form* in Modernity and its aftermath. Whereas pre-Modern and pre-technological forms of extremism have doubtlessly existed, one could hypothesise that its modern forms are characterized by and promote the deprivation of *humanness*, so much so that “totalitarianism” would be unthinkable before the technological age.⁵

How could this be argued for? Upon closer inspection, the fanatic mind-set may well be the exact opposite of the *contemplative* mind-set, which has been primordial in Marcel’s thinking from his earliest writings. It seems as though the “fanatic mind” is not just a coincidental issue haphazardly discussed in Marcel’s critique of modern culture; it may even be the Manichaeic spectre that he sees haunting Western thinking at large, especially (though not exclusively) in the form of Idealism. If this is true, the ominous spirit of abstraction characteristic of Modernity cannot *but* produce fanatic minds, as its extreme consequence.⁶

At this point we should be reminded of Marcel’s famous distinction between “primary reflection” and “secondary reflection.” This distinction is linked to two modes of relating. In one mode we treat reality as a “problem” (*problème*); in another, we face it as a “mystery” (*mystère*). Treating reality as a problem comes down to dissecting concrete experience and objectifying its constituents. This way of thinking is called “primary reflection.” Facing reality as a mystery, on the other hand, entails succumbing to it, being overwhelmed by it, or finding oneself in the midst of it.⁷ The corresponding mode of reflection is called “secondary reflection.” Constituted as abstract, primary reflection analyses, whereas secondary reflection, rooted in concrete existence, synthesises. While the first is disincarnate, the latter relies on concrete, embodied experience.⁸

While primary reflection or abstract thinking may not as such be a problem for Marcel, things become different when, haunted by its inherent “spirit,” primary reflection runs wild and insulates itself from secondary reflection. This is what happens in the fanatic mindset—a mindset that we believe *also* characterises the suicide martyr quoted above. Several aspects, according to Marcel, characterize the fanatic mind. For example, a will refusing to be put into question (*une volonté de non-remise en question*), a conscience obsessed with a purely imaginary, fictitious center (*une conscience tétanisée par un foyer imaginaire*), or such a mind’s socially contaminating, contagious potential: “the masses *qua* masses, are essentially the stuff of which fanaticism is made” (*les masses, en tant que masses, sont essentiellement fanatisables*).⁹ The fanatic consciousness, Marcel claims, is amenable to the always-larger role

⁵ Georges Bataille argues that for archaic cultures the extreme state (e.g., of violence) rather *unites* than *opposes* parties (as would be the case in current forms of fanaticised conflicts). See “La part Maudite” and “Théorie de la religion,” in *Œuvres Complètes VII* (Paris : Gallimard, 1976), esp. pp. 249-259 and 321-323.

⁶ We find a similar approach, albeit in different terms, in Levinas, who was deeply influenced by Marcel and whose rejection of the main strand of Western thought also implied a critique of the inclosing reserve of a monological Self (rather than the forgetfulness of Being that worried Heidegger). See Brian Treanor, *Aspects of Alterity: Levinas, Marcel, and the Contemporary Debate* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2007). For an analysis of the spirit of abstraction, see Boyd Blundell, “Creative Fidelity: Gabriel Marcel’s Influence on Paul Ricœur,” in A. Wiercinski (ed.), *Between Suspicion and Sympathy: Paul Ricœur’s Unstable Equilibrium* (Toronto: Hermeneutic Press, 2003), pp. 89-102.

⁷ Marcel puts it this way: “A problem is something which I meet, which I find complete before me, but which I can therefore lay siege to and reduce. But a mystery is something in which I myself am involved, and it can therefore only be thought of as a sphere where the distinction between what is in me and what is before me loses its meaning and its initial validity.” See Gabriel Marcel, *The Mystery of Being*, Vol. I (London: Harvill Press, 1950), p. 211; orig. *Le mystère de l’être* (Paris: Association “Présence de Gabriel Marcel,” 1997), p. 227. See also *MAMS*, p. 69 (*HCH*, p. 69).

⁸ See Brendan Sweetman, *The Vision of Gabriel Marcel: Epistemology, Human Person, the Transcendent* (New York: Brill Press, 2008), pp. 53-68.

⁹ *MAMS*, p. 139; see also pp. 133-152 (*HCH*, p. 104; also pp. 100-113 *passim*).

played by technology, which, underpinned by a spirit of abstraction, uproots individuals and completely destroys their intimate sphere. The eradication of intimacy leads to the need for a new albeit imaginary focus. The fanatic is strongly infatuated by such a focus, to the point of being blindly obsessed by it.¹⁰

Marcel's account is worth reading and re-reading since it contains several illuminating elements. I will highlight some of them here. What strikes one is that Marcel attempts a phenomenological description of the fanatic consciousness.¹¹ The fanatic mind, he claims, is not so much a mind in a different *state* (depressed, moody, melancholic, etc.) but in a different *mode*. The fanatic mind cannot appear to itself as such, it is blind to its own way of relating. To give an example, a depressed person mostly knows that they are depressed, whereas a fanatic cannot see that they have become fanaticized. An external position is required to judge that a person is a fanatic. "The wish to become a martyr dominates my life, my heart, my soul, and my feelings," Ismail Masawabi continues in his farewell letter, clearly stating thereby that there is no inner differentiation anymore which could allow for self-reflection. He is overwhelmed by a desire for martyrdom.

At this point, the "fanatic" might demur, saying that Marcel unjustly prioritizes a (what they may call) ignorant, sceptical or liberal view over a position that has gained an existential foothold. They might even appeal to Jean-Jacques Rousseau's enigmatic "plea" for (a kind of) fanaticism in his *Emile ou de l'éducation*: "Fanaticism, although sanguinary and cruel, is nevertheless a grand and strong passion (*une passion grande et forte*) which elevates the heart of man, makes him despise death, and gives him a prodigious energy (*ressort prodigieux*) that need only be better directed to produce the most sublime virtues."¹² The fanatic mind, s/he might continue, is endowed with a *passion grande et forte* constituting a *ressort prodigieux*.

In other words, the fanatic mind represents a plenitude of meaning while the opposite (what Rousseau calls "atheism" or "irreligion") fully lacks motivational resources. It is certainly true that this passion may be partly inspired by fear. The "Mohammedans," as Rousseau quotes Chardin, believe in a *Poul-Serrho*, a bridge crossing the eternal fire in which those are thrown who do not pass the final judgment. "Philosopher," Rousseau mockingly concludes his brief account of fanaticism, "your moral laws are very fine, but I beg you to show me their sanction. Stop beating around the bush for a moment, and tell me plainly what you put in the place of the Poul-Serrho."¹³ Of this motivating threat we find a remote echo in Masawabi's letter: "God will not forgive you if you accept humiliation and don't fight to put an end to the situation and to strengthen Islam."¹⁴

Let us assume for the sake of the argument that Rousseau and Marcel are talking about the same phenomenon that they are each trying to interpret from their own conceptual framework. Interestingly, Marcel would deny the fanaticized mind's passional resources as defended by Rousseau, since its essence, as we have seen, is not a state but a mode—a distinction that could partly solve the problem. However, an (imaginary) discussion between Marcel and Rousseau would concern the assessment of the concepts of passion and illumination respectively. The question would be if a passion *can* be self-reflective, and if it *has* to be self-reflective. Marcel's semi-phenomenological view argues for the latter, whereas Rousseau's reliance on the original goodness of the inner-human affectivity seems to care less about self-reflexivity. The long-term consequences of fanaticism, Rousseau holds, are far less detrimental

¹⁰ See *MAMS*, pp. 110, 111 (*HCH*, p. 147).

¹¹ Paul Ricœur, "Gabriel Marcel and Phenomenology," in: P.A. Schilpp & L.E. Hahn (eds.), *The Philosophy of Gabriel Marcel* (Chicago: Open Court, 1984), pp. 471-498.

¹² J.-J. Rousseau, *Emile or On Education IV*, trans. Allan Bloom (New York: Basic Books, 1979), p. 312.

¹³ *Ibid.*, p. 314.

¹⁴ Reuter, *Life as a Weapon*, p. 91.

than its short-term (“terrorizing”) effects may be,¹⁵ and this again shows Rousseau’s trust in affectivity, a trust by far outweighing the lack of reflexivity. Rousseau’s review of Masawabi’s address would be altogether different from Marcel’s, for without approving of the young man’s intentions, it would at least appreciate the affective drives occasioning those intentions.

This highly complex issue reveals that in Marcel, reflection prevails over passion, since passion might eventually lead to a frenzied mind-set (i.e., one blind to its own *mode* of relating to its object). True, it will have to be a “secondary” reflection, that is, a reflection that rather synthesises than analyses. The notion of “secondary reflection” overcomes the mind-body distinction with which Rousseau is still struggling. According to Marcel, it even allows for cherishing ideas without falling prey to fanaticism, since some ideas (i.e., *truly* religious ideas) are invulnerable to fanaticism: “We have to recognize that a true religion cannot have this power of making men fanatical and that, on the contrary, wherever this fanaticizing power does exist, there is a perversion of religion.”¹⁶ Again, this shows that (secondary) reflection goes beyond mere “passion,” for the very reason that it is susceptible to a “criterion.” This criterion cannot be rationally identified (“objectified”); it will rather “reflect” the *synthetic* (rather than splitting) virtues secondary reflection is endowed with. Just as well as religion will, Marcel would add, since once infected by fanaticism, religion fades out *as* religion. Religious fanaticism, then, would be a contradiction in terms.

It must be emphasised that Marcel uses a normative (rather than an empirical) notion of “religion.” Interestingly, this normative notion *includes* human finitude and fallibility as essential to any adequate understanding whatsoever. I would argue that Marcel’s notion of “secondary reflection” aims at transforming reason, not only by dismissing its implicit body/mind distinction but also by explicitly taking into account human finitude. Obviously, this does not exclude but rather implies critical awareness. If fanaticism intervenes in religion, Marcel argues, it is usually due to an over-emphasis on privileged intermediaries (the Prophet, the Church) to such an extent that human weakness and frailty are completely overlooked.¹⁷

We find evidence of this in Masawabi’s letter (*italics added*): “Therefore, in the name of *Jerusalem* and the *Al-Aqsa Mosque*, in the name of God on earth, I prefer to meet God and leave humankind behind. Therefore I have told myself that I will be with the *Prophet Muhammad and his followers* tomorrow.”¹⁸ It would go too far to further analyse Marcel’s notion of religion here, but the immediate context suggests that a “critical spirit” (*esprit critique*) should at least be associated with it.¹⁹

¹⁵ “Thus fanaticism, although more deadly (*plus funeste*) in its immediate effects than what is today called the philosophic spirit, is much less so in its consequences.” Rousseau, *Emile*, p. 312.

¹⁶ Marcel, *MAMS*, p. 137 (*HCH*, p. 102, 103). Marcel also writes: “a passion, [...] in fact, precisely the passion of fanaticism.” The basis of the passion of fanaticism, Marcel adds, “is fear” and “implies an unconfessed emotional insecurity (*un sentiment d’insécurité*) that converts itself into an outward aggressiveness (*s’extravertit en agressivité*).” *MAMS*, p. 141 (*HCH*, p. 106).

¹⁷ “But if fanaticism can creep back into such religions as we are well aware that it has done among the followers of Mahomet (*les sectateurs de Mahomet*), though no more strikingly so than among certain Jews and among very many Christians—that is, it seems to me, only due to the growth and intervention between man and God of certain mediating powers, such as the Church or the Prophet, which, instead of remaining mere mediators, are endowed by the fanaticized consciousness with certain prerogatives quite incompatible with the weakness proper to the creature qua creature.” *MAMS*, p. 142 (*HCH*, p. 107).

¹⁸ Reuter, *Life as a Weapon*, p. 91.

¹⁹ See Marcel, *MAMS*, p. 143 (*HCH*, p. 107); also see *The Mystery of Being*, Vol. I, p. 16 (*Mystère de l’être*, p. 23) where “liberty” and “benevolence” are linked with the spirit of the Gospel. Referring to Marcel’s *Tragic Wisdom and Beyond* (Evanston, IL: Northwestern U.P., 1973), Thomas C. Anderson mentions the need of being purified and of adopting “the proper perspective and ontological humility” in order to be “able to experience Being or an absolute Thou or Holy God” and to “be in a position to assess the authenticity of the faith of other purported believers in God”; see Thomas C. Anderson, *A Commentary on Gabriel Marcel’s The Mystery of Being* (Milwaukee, WI.: Marquette U.P., 2006), p. 163.

Intersubjectivity, Mystery, and Evil

Epitomising Marcel's account of the fanatic mind, we can say that it focuses on a consciousness that is blind to its own *mode* of relating to its object. Such a consciousness has lost any flexibility to differentiate between itself and its object; instead, it seems to be immersed by that object. (Recall: "The wish to become a martyr dominates my life, my heart, my soul, and my feelings.")

Let us now move one step further to highlight Marcel's intriguing notion of "mystery," in order to see if it can be used to gauge the relation between the fanaticized subject (the "terrorist") and his victim. This notion seems to outdo phenomenological (i.e. Husserlian) intentionality in the strict sense. "Mystery," Marcel writes:

[Is] a place where I find myself committed (*quelque chose où je me trouve engagé*) [...] as a whole man in so far as I achieve a unity which, for that matter, by its very definition, can never be grasped in itself, grasped as something apart from me; this unity is not an object of knowledge but of my creative impulse and my faith. As soon as we postulate the notion of mystery, we abolish that frontier between what lies in the self and what lies before the self.²⁰

Apparently, "mystery" *resembles* the experience of the fanatic mind. However, as opposed to the latter, the mind overwhelmed by mystery is at least *aware* of it. True, the mystery of "being," for example, does not allow the philosopher to objectify it but rather to elucidate it from within (which would be the philosopher's task, for that matter). The same counts for the mysteries of love, freedom, hope, or evil: these are binding or engaging without, however, being prone to concretion. The experience of "mystery," as the overwhelming, disrupts the infelicitous subject/object split that is a defining characteristic of Modernity.

Notably, "evil" is even the *first* example of mystery given by Marcel himself: "Evil reveals itself to me as [...] a mystery when I have recognized that I cannot treat myself as something external to evil, as simply having to observe evil from the outside and map out its contours, but that on the contrary I am implicated in evil—just as one is implicated (*impliqué*), for instance, in some crime."²¹ This understanding of evil as a mystery liquidating any subject/object divide invites us to re-examine the expected consequences of the fanaticism discussed above: terrorism, or even, suicide terrorism. The physically destructive reality of terrorist attacks, even though initiated by "them," by "the other side" (i.e., the terrorists), "implicate" their victims in themselves, in the sense of *involving* or *engaging* them. Though "justice," "politics," or "science" would assess the perpetrators' guilt as being worlds apart from their victims, to those enmeshed in terrorist actions, passively or actively, such a distinction may be muddled. This is at least how I read Marcel.

I am drawing here equally on victims' or even eye-witnesses reports. The FBI Office for Victim Assistance published a report entitled, "Coping after Terrorism for Survivors." It says:

Victims who were harmed, physically or emotionally, in a traumatic disaster want to understand why the crime happened, and families wonder why their

²⁰ Marcel, *MAMS*, p.90 (*HCH*, p. 69). See also Gene Reeves, "The Idea of Mystery in the Philosophy of Gabriel Marcel," in P.A. Schilpp & L.E. Hahn (eds.), *The Philosophy of Gabriel Marcel* (La Salle, IL.: Open Court, 1984).

²¹ Marcel, *MAMS*, p.90 (*HCH*, p. 69).

loved one was harmed. Some people find it easier to accept what happened if they can blame themselves in some way. This is a normal way of trying to once again feel a sense of control over their lives. Victims often feel guilt and regret for things they did or did not say or do and that they should have protected themselves or a loved one better or have done something to prevent an injury. Survivors spend a lot of time thinking “If only I had...”. This guilt does not make sense because the circumstances leading to terrorism usually cannot be controlled and are hard to predict.²²

The final sentence of this paragraph, while meant for the best, is itself at odds with the victims’ inner experience itself, as it denies the latter’s legitimacy. Still, this does not imply that the “conclusive” sentence is *therapeutically* “justified.” On the contrary, if there be “justification” at all, then it is rather to be associated with the victims’ feelings of guilt. Obviously, this does not entail that they are to be “blamed” or even “prosecuted” for their tragic victimhood (which would indeed be ridiculous). What the “mysterious” character of evil (i.e., the terrorist attack) entails is that both the perpetrator and the victim have been immersed in a sphere of commonality in which feelings are *shared* and *appropriated*. Perpetrators of violent acts, provided they survive, may manifest a tendency to identify with the victim, albeit by (“erroneously”) adopting a victim’s role themselves.²³ Yet again, from a legal perspective they *are* not victims but voluntary agents whose deeds are punishable. A psychoanalyst might even adduce that self-victimization is a coping strategy or a defence mechanism. However, irrespective of these, undoubtedly “legitimate,” concerns, I would like to argue that notions of “rational agency” and “involuntary victimhood” draw on a category of subjectivity radically put into question by Marcel’s notion of “mystery.” Embroiled in the violent encounter brought about by the terrorist, subject and object, agent and patient, as well as their respective feelings, gradually *become* vicarious. Akin to lovemaking, the turmoil or merry-go-round of suicide attacks merge subjects and objects, agents and patients alike. Limbs mix, members mingle, attributions and appropriations of predicates run together. Marcel writes:

Evil is not only in front of my eyes, it is within me: even more than this, in such a realm the distinction between what is within me and what lies outside me becomes meaningless (*vide de sens*); one might say that such a distinction has a physical rather than a metaphysical validity.²⁴

This is certainly not a plea for redefining our legal system, since terrorism, which causes unspeakable horrors for many people, remains “evil.” There is no doubt that Marcel would never question this, as can also be inferred from his critique of the fanatic mind as a self-destructive mind following a deleterious “logic of death.”²⁵ My point is that the fusion of (“subjectified”) “subject” —i.e., the terrorist agent—and (“objectified”) “object —i.e., the victim—comes down to the boost of an intersubjectivity precipitately enhanced, one that

²² See “Coping after Terrorism for Survivors,” FBI Office for Victim Assistance. Available at https://www.fbi.gov/file-repository/coping_terrorism_injured.pdf/view. Also see Maria Ericson, “Encounters between Former Perpetrators and their Victims: Prospects and Challenges for Reconciliation,” in Jalil Roshandel & Nathan Lean (eds.), *The Moral Psychology of Terrorism. Implications for Security* (Newcastle: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2013), pp. 79-115.

²³ A variety of evidence indicates that ex-perpetrators may sometimes seek to embrace and identify with the victim’s role themselves; see Roy E. Baumeister, Arlene Stillwell and Sara R. Wotman, “Victim and Perpetrator Accounts of Interpersonal Conflict: Autobiographical Narratives About Anger,” *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, Vol. 59, no. 5, 1990, p. 1003.

²⁴ Marcel, *MAMS*, p. 91 (*HCH*, p. 69).

²⁵ Marcel, *MAMS*, p. 150 (*HCH*, p. 112).

hastens towards the other without, for that matter, acknowledging that other *as* other. Therefore, to the *extent* that this acknowledgement is a precondition for intersubjectivity, intersubjectivity will not be realised.

Marcel readers will recall the vital importance of “intersubjectivity” in his work, e.g., in his *Le mystère de l'être*. Intersubjectivity only becomes possible if the presence of the other is neither taken for granted nor reduced to an object or an objective fact, but if it is truly *acknowledged*. It liquefies the boundaries between single, separate beings. However, such a liquefaction, if not liquidation, of these boundaries presupposes a turn towards Being itself, as the common setting in which humans exist. This turn ought to be a *concerned* one; I ought to be concerned with Being as something that matters. Marcel continues, observing that, “I concern myself with being only in so far as I have a more or less distinct consciousness of the underlying unity which ties (*relie*) me to other beings of whose reality I already have a preliminary notion (*dont je pressens la réalité*)...[T]hey are above all my fellow-travellers—my *fellow-creatures*.”²⁶

Suffice it to state here something that is obvious in itself but which may still shed a new light on the suicide attack: the victims are randomly chosen without having been previously acknowledged in their otherness, let alone that there will be a Hegelian struggle for life in order to gain recognition. It is the blatant absence of such recognition which is most unacceptable for the survivors of any terror attack and for the governments of their respective countries. If it is true that, as Marcel claims, the inter-subjective affects subjectivity itself to the core,²⁷ then one might conclude that the perpetrators of terrorism not only attack others (non-recognized *as* others) but even themselves *inasmuch* as they are always already affected by those others. Suppressing intersubjectivity from the onset, suicide activists kill themselves in two ways, since both the body and its structure of subjectivity are destroyed. Or even more precisely, before bodily death, the underlying structure of subjectivity in which the heinous act originates had already been liable to steady extermination, due to an always-increasing neglect of intersubjective embeddedness. This remark of the terrorist captures this loss of intersubjectivity in a fanatical mind: “My brothers and my family, I shall be in Paradise, where everything will be mine. So don't be sad that you've lost me. In Paradise I shall be immortal, so you should be glad that I'm there. To all those that have loved me, I say: don't weep, for your tears won't give me peace. This is the way I have chosen. So, if you have really loved me, carry on and carry my weapon.”²⁸

Going even further, and asking how an annihilated structure of subjectivity can be the source of an *act* at all, and if a suicide activist is an *actor* or an *agent*, one is drawn to the following conclusion: the suicide attack is not an act in itself but an always increasing suppression of intersubjectivity, radicalised in proportion to its externalised, “explosive” outcome.²⁹ It is a non-act, an “act” averting any action or agency whatsoever. If it makes sense

²⁶ Marcel, *The Mystery of Being*, Vol. II *Faith and Reality*, trans. René Hague (London: The Harvill Press, 1951), p. 20 (*Mystère de l'être*, II, p. 20). See also his remark: “...a thought which directs itself towards being, by that very act recreates around itself the intersubjective presence which a philosophy of monadist inspiration begins by expelling” (*ibid.*, p. 19).

²⁷ “Intersubjectivity plays its part also within the life of the subject, even at moments when the latter's only intercourse is with itself. In its own intrinsic structure subjectivity is already, and in the most profound sense, genuinely intersubjective.” Marcel, *The Mystery of Being*, p.182 (Marcel, *Mystère de l'être*, I, p. 198).

²⁸ Reuter, *Life as a Weapon*, p. 91.

²⁹ See Max Picard's analysis of Hitlerism, which in many respects anticipates the phenomenon of suicide terror. Hitlerism, according to Picard, is a “dynamism solidified, dynamism barricaded as behind concrete and expecting its own outburst.” (zementierte[r] Dynamismus, der Dynamismus, der sich hinter dem Zement verbarrikadiert hat und der auf seinen eigenen Ausbruch wartet). And also: “it is the rigidity of Gorgon frozen in advance of the freeze in blood which its stare produces” (es ist die Starre der Gorgo, die selbst im voraus erstarrt

to connect Marcel's analysis of the fanatic mind to the suicide attackers, one could say that the latter's blindness and loss of reflexivity keeps pace with the extinction of the structure of their subjectivity. Blindness to one's *mode* of relating, being tantamount to loss of reflexivity, annihilates one to the core and cannot but prepare for the inevitable consequence: killing others; more precisely, killing others *as though* they are non-others. The fanatic mind destroys the alterity structure on which it is based and which it strives to eradicate. As such, it is self-enhancing and self-destructive at once. It realizes itself by destroying its condition of possibility. "The wish to become a martyr dominates my life, my heart, my soul, and my feelings," Masawabi wrote, and this wish exemplifies our point here. "The wish to become a martyr," rather than being "political," "rational," or even "religious," will ultimately erase itself *as wish*.³⁰ Following Marcel's diary entry of 7 February 1914, we could even say that this is predictable, since the absence of *inwardness* excludes both individuality and true relatedness.³¹

We cannot avoid concluding that the *apparent* state of "intersubjectivity" brought about by the suicide attack is not only precipitated but also its own caricature, since it lacks acknowledgment of the other.³² Moreover, it neglects the *presence* of the other as something different from objectivity or factuality. "Presence" is another crucial notion developed in *The Mystery of Being*. It refers to an, as it were, auratic dimension the existence of which is not susceptible to clear observation but rather to subtler forms of awareness such as "presentiment," "recognition," or "reception." One can never take someone's *presence* merely for granted, since it is as magic as it is vulnerable and as sacred as it is unarmed. Rather than observe or *conceive* it, I can only *perceive* it intermittently: "a presence can only be intermittently perceived."³³ Famous Marcel scholar Katharine Rose Hanley notes that in Marcel, "presence is not a distinct entity but a communion realized by spiritual interaction."³⁴

Consequently, concomitant with the suicide attacker's non-acknowledgment of the other is an endorsed self-destruction, which nonetheless fails to affect the other's (non-objective, non-observable) *presence*. The paradox of the suicide attack is that it is both successful and non-successful: it *rather* kills the self than the other and it has already *started* doing this long before the decisive "act" is undertaken. Provided that *presence* supersedes observable mere being-there, the attack itself, tragic though it be, is insignificant in comparison

vor der Starre, die sie erzeugen wird). Max Picard, *Hitler in uns selbst* (Zürich: Rentsch, 1946); trans. Heinrich Hauser, *Hitler in Ourselves* (New York: Henry Regnery, 1947), pp. 27, 28.

³⁰ In an early article on Hitlerism, Levinas writes that its inner logic is based not on propagation but on *expansion*: "But force is characterized by another type of propagation. The person who exerts force does not abandon it. Force does not disappear among those who submit to it. It is attached to the personality or society exerting it, enlarging that person or society while subordinating the rest." E. Levinas, "Reflections on the Philosophy of Hitlerism," in *Critical Inquiry* 17, No.1, 1990, p. 70 (orig. *Quelques réflexions sur la philosophie de l'hitlérisme*. Paris: Éditions Fata Morgana, 1997, p. 70).

³¹ "C'est seulement à partir du moment où l'individualité a véritablement un dedans qu'elle peut se penser comme réellement distincte d'une autre (et que l'amour est possible); or, ce dedans, il faut qu'elle se le constitue elle-même." Gabriel Marcel, *Journal métaphysique* (Paris: Gallimard, 1935/1927), p. 62.

³² I am partly inspired here by Erich Fromm. In his *Anatomy of Human Destructiveness* he claims that "necrophile" behaviour (such as Hitler's), unable to establish a warm relation to others, desperately searches to realise this in death.

³³ "Une présence ne peut être ... perçue que de façon intermittente," Marcel, *Le Mystère de l'être*, I, p. 224 (author's translation).

³⁴ "La présence n'est pas une entité distincte mais une communion effectuée par une interaction spirituelle," Katharine Rose Hanley, "Réflexions sur la présence comme signe d'immortalité, d'après la pensée de Gabriel Marcel," in *Revue Philosophique de Louvain* 74, no. 22, 1976, p.217 (author's translation). See also, Katharine Rose Hanley, "Causes of Violence and Resources for Peace in Gabriel Marcel's Work," in: *Proceedings of the Second World Congress on Violence and Human Coexistence* (Montréal: PA, 1992), pp. 435-442; and Rico Sneller, "Gabriel Marcel and the Rootedness of Exceptional Phenomena in Existence," in Hein van Dongen, Hans Gerding and Rico Sneller (eds.), *Wild Beasts of the Philosophical Desert: Philosophers on Telepathy and Other Exceptional Experiences* (Newcastle: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2014), pp. 121-135.

to 1) what preceded the act, and 2) what it intended to bring about. It fails in a double sense: for one thing, to prevent the self-destructive tendency in which it originated, and for another, to achieve its goal.³⁵

Marcel confirms this self-destruction as preceding the actual terror attack in a diary entry of 10 March 1933 on suicide:

To return to suicide. At bottom, experience seems to show us that men can be disposed of, got rid of. . . . But in that case, it is clear that I cannot consider myself able to be disposed of unless I treat myself as a perfect stranger; unless, indeed, I put aside all possibility of *haunting*, I should come to the conclusion that the more actual and profound my intimacy with myself, the more right I am in believing that the picture I formed of myself as an object which it is in my power to put right out of use is one to be treated with caution, and even absurd in itself.³⁶

But, so one could retort, is not the Masawabi case an example of martyrdom rather than suicide? I fear that we cannot go any further here than following Marcel's distinction between *martyrdom* or *self-sacrifice* as an affirmation of Being and *suicide* as an ultimate form of self-affirmation.³⁷ The only way to push the present discussion a little further is to assess the *extent* to which Masawabi's farewell statement bears testimony of a fanatic mind-set. Several features have already been highlighted: its Manichaeic dualism, its insistence on privileged intermediaries ("Jerusalem", "the Al-Aqsa Mosque," "God *on earth*" (sic), "the Prophet Muhammad and his followers"), its neglect of human finitude ("I prefer to meet God and leave humankind behind"), etc. A quick glance on variegated historical pre-execution farewell addresses at large in light of the issue of "fanaticism" seems to offer clues for further debate.³⁸ However, caution will always be required, since *any* social, ideological or religious sphere—even the "noblest"—may be susceptible to fanaticism.

Returning to the category of "evil": if it is a mystery, it cannot be ruled out. "The [m]ystery of evil . . . means that it is useless and illusory [*chimérique*] to think that evil will somehow be overcome in history; and no less illusory to resort to some kind of dialectical artifice for integrating [*resorption*] evil into a higher synthesis," Marcel concludes at the end of an article on evil.³⁹ This should not lure one into hypostasizing evil for that matter, he adds, since any form of Manichaeic dualism opposing Good and Evil rather contributes to evil than defeats it. It seems as if we had better welcome it; not as something desirable (which would be masochistic) but as something that invites us to open ourselves to a "wider and perhaps infinite communion" (*une communion plus vaste et peut-être infinie*). Evil then becomes the evil-over-

³⁵ Concerning "failure," see Sartre's analysis of the inevitable *échec* of the moral act in Jean-Paul Sartre, *Cahiers pour une morale* (Paris: Gallimard, 1983), p. 451ff.

³⁶ Gabriel Marcel, *Being and Having*, trans. by Katharine Farrer (Glasgow: Glasgow University Press, 1949), pp. 137, 138; orig. *Etre et avoir* (Paris: Aubier, 1935), pp. 198, 199f. In the French original, "disposed of" and "got rid of" are written in English and put in italics. Also, see the entry of 16 January 1933: "Link between suicide and non-disposability [i.e. for others]," p. 124. This *indisponibilité* was defined earlier as "being occupied with self" (*être occupé de soi*), and put on the same footing as pessimism. *Ibid.*, p. 73 (orig. pp. 105, 106).

³⁷ "What is affirmed in martyrdom is not the self, but the Being to which the self becomes a witness in the very act of self-renunciation. But one can conversely say that in suicide, the self affirms itself by its claim to withdraw from reality." Marcel, *Being and Having*, p. 127

³⁸ Struggling with the same issue, Jacques Derrida suggests that one of the reasons why bin-Laden should be criticized is that neither his actions nor his discourse hold any promise for the future (*avenir*). See Jacques Derrida and Jürgen Habermas, *Le "concept" du 11 septembre. Dialogues à New York (octobre-décembre 2001) avec Giovanna Borradori* (Paris: Galilée, 2003), p. 168ff.

³⁹ See *Tragic Wisdom and Beyond* (Evanston, IL.: Northwestern University Press, 1985/1973), p. 145; orig. "La rencontre avec le mal," in *Pour une sagesse tragique et son au-delà* (Paris: Plon, 1968), p. 212.

which-I-have-“triumphed.” Once more, Marcel shows that he is capable of combining spiritual depth and a critique of the rational, atomist subject.

Conclusion and Perspectives

My discussion of fanaticism and suicide terrorism in light of the philosophy of Gabriel Marcel has elucidated the following points.

First, the fanatic mind-set that ultimately leads to suicide terrorism is made possible by abstract thinking that treats anything, things and humans alike, as an object. Fanaticism itself is the outcome of a prevailing spirit of abstraction, inasmuch as it reshapes the world in a simplistic, purely abstract (Manichaeic) good/evil polarity; thereby, it completely loses sight of the contemplative, self-reflective stance it is suppressing while also presupposing it. If Marcel is right in assuming that fanaticism is not a mere elective option for the mind, among others, but its very reduction; and if he is justified in claiming that the fanatic mind-set cannot avoid presupposing self-reflexivity or a contemplative mind-set, then it would not make sense to wholly give up on fanatical minds today and to merely suppress or demonise them. Doing so might precipitate a fall into the same bifurcated position artificially construed by the fanatics themselves. We can easily see this in many contemporary liberation movements. Starting from a very justified resistance against fascism, sexism, or racism, they sometimes end up using the same violent means as their opponents.⁴⁰ The most astonishing phenomenon is perhaps that sometimes, against all odds, the scourge of anti-Semitism can be expressed by those with opposing political views (for example, both among radical left and radical right groups).

Secondly, the fanatic mind paradoxically brings about what it destroys and destroys what it is in search of: intimacy. It produces the *cold* intimacy of common death and devastated bodies lying side by side in the streets. By the same token it destroys the possibility of renewing an intimacy already liable to increasing annihilation in our technological age; an age in which the damage done to *concreteness* and *personal relations* by abstract thinking is reiterated and even enhanced by fanaticism.

Yet, similar to acts of terrorism, technological annihilation fails to destroy what it presupposes: an inextinguishable structure of intimate connectedness antecedent to both the fanatic mind-set and technological abstraction, while even conditioning it. For that reason I suggested that suicide terrorism may amount to a precipitated, albeit *flawed*, form of intersubjectivity. Radicals taking other human beings down along with themselves into their self-inflicted annihilation will find the intimacy they are out for only in death, which is identical to saying that they will not find it.

Thirdly, to the extent (1) that suicide terrorism originates in a fanatic mind-set, and (2) that it is an evil, and ultimately (3) that evil itself can be seen as an experience of mystery, in so far as it blurs the boundaries of the subject, the fanatic mind-set itself involuntarily *brings about* what it intends to destroy. The corruption of the best is not just bad, but, as the Romans said, it is the *worst* (*corruption optimi pessima*); in terms of Marcel, the “best” and the “worst” share their “mysterious” character. Miraculously, the *fanatic* suppression of the “best” (Marcel: of a contemplative, reflexive mind-set, intersubjective intimacy) leads to the same mystery as the one it produces, albeit that *this* time it is seen as “evil” (i.e., destruction, fear and terror).

⁴⁰ As regards the risk of seeing fanaticism as an attitude to be *merely* oppressed I would like to refer once more to Jan-Werner Müller’s account of populism. In this account, Müller gives particular recommendations on how to deal with populists. (*What is populism?*, pp. 75-100). Obviously, his recommendations only make sense for my entire argument if one agrees that there is some similarity between populists and suicide terrorists, an admittedly controversial comparison. Should there be any ground for this hypothesis, then an ominous implication may be that contemporary populism could be just as self-destructive as Islamic suicide terrorism.

Finally, since (1) suicide terrorism originates in a fanatic mind-set, and (2) the fanatic mind-set particularly (though not exclusively) is rooted in the all-pervasive spirit of abstraction characteristic of our technological society, the latter can be said to be at least implicated in, and perhaps even responsible for, its own destruction by suicide terrorism; to the extent, that is, that technological societies, in a particular way, *condition* totalitarian mind-sets by gradually depriving individuals of their humanness.

If one does not agree with Marcel's premises, my conclusions would hardly make sense. However, I do not think it too far-fetched to assume (1) that fanaticism narrows the mind, and (2) that a predominance of technology in our societies today is *involved* in what threatens these same societies: fanatic mind-sets. The only issue to be yet corroborated, which I refer to later studies, is the intrinsic relation between contemporary suicide terrorism and modernity.