



NEOLIBERAL SOCIETIES AND THE DEATH DRIVE: THE AIM OF ALL LIFE IS DEATH

Melvin Cody¹

¹Clayton State University

Abstract

This paper delves into the relationship between neoliberalism and capitalism, examining how neoliberal capitalism, as the current iteration of the system, uniquely impacts Western society. It critically analyzes the concept of 'Faustian restlessness,' an essential characteristic of Western civilization marked by a relentless pursuit of ambition and economic growth, often at the cost of moral and spiritual values. The study also explores the psychological effects of living under neoliberal capitalism in the United States, noting significant impacts on mental health, including increased anxiety and a profound sense of alienation and emptiness. This investigation extends to how individuals reshape their identities and relationships in response to capitalist demands. Furthermore, the research engages with the broader societal influence of capitalism and the interplay between the conscious and subconscious mind, drawing on insights from thinkers like Slavoj Žižek, Sigmund Freud, and Jacques Lacan. This comprehensive examination highlights the need to reassess the broader implications of neoliberal capitalism, emphasizing its profound psychological and societal effects.

Keywords

Neoliberalism, Capitalism, Faustian restlessness

"An old Cherokee is teaching his grandson about life. "A fight is going on inside me," he told the boy. "It is a terrible fight between two wolves. One is evil – he is anger, envy, sorrow, regret, greed, arrogance, self-pity, guilt, resentment, inferiority, lies, false pride, superiority, and ego." He continued, "The other is good – he is joy, peace, love, hope, serenity, humility, kindness, benevolence, empathy, generosity, truth, compassion, and faith. The same fight is going on inside you – and inside every other person, too." The grandson thought about it for a minute and then asked his grandfather, "Which wolf will win?" The old Cherokee simply replied, "The one you feed." (virtuesforlife.com)

No society, no country is free of the history of senseless wholesale massacre of imagined or real enemies. The relative ubiquity of these phenomena throughout the history of civilization cannot be ignored. The question of the existence of the death drive as part of the core of human psychology is, unfortunately, a practical and not merely a theoretical problem --- Kernberg, 2003a

We know that the law is spiritual, but I am unspiritual, sold as a slave to sin. 15 I do not understand what I do. For what I want to do I do not do, but what I hate I do.... 19 For I do not do the good I want to do, but the evil I do not want to do—this I keep on doing. 20 Now if I do what I do not want to do, it is no longer I who do it, but it is sin living in me that does it ----Romans 15:19-20

-*"The aim of all life is death"* (Freud,1920)

Introduction

This study will examine different facets of Western society, particularly emphasizing neoliberalism and capitalism. In this paper, the terms neoliberalism and capitalism are used in conjunction to highlight that neoliberal capitalism, as the most recent iteration of capitalism, possesses distinct attributes and characteristics. These unique features will be identified and discussed in the context of the specific aspects of the capitalist reality the paper addresses.

This study will critically examine the concept of 'Faustian restlessness', a notion that encapsulates the unending chase for ambition, power, and economic growth. This pursuit often comes at the cost of traditional values and spiritual fulfillment. This restlessness, a fundamental aspect of Western civilization, finds its epitome in neoliberal capitalism. The relentless quest for more, driven by this restlessness, frequently results in the neglect of moral, ethical, and existential considerations. The research will also explore into the psychological impacts of living in a neoliberal capitalist society, particularly in the United States. This paper will underscore the profound impact of the capitalist economic system on the mental well-being of its neoliberal subject, leading to increased anxiety, alienation, and, most profoundly, a deep sense of more and spiritual emptiness. It will investigate into the pressures individuals face as they continually attempt to reshape their identities and relationships to align with the demands of capital. This situation raises significant concerns and warrants detailed examination.

Moreover, this study aims to illuminate the broader influence of capitalism. This influence extends beyond its economic framework, shaping societal values, norms, and cultural behaviors. At a deeper level, the study will explore the internal conflict between the conscious mind and subconscious drives. It will draw on the profound insights of renowned thinkers such as Slovenian philosopher Slavoj Žižek, Sigmund Freud, Jacques Lacan, and others. The study will argue that, despite the conscious mind's attempts to control human actions, these subconscious drives ultimately lead. The study will also draw on Freud's extensive work on this topic to understand the unconscious aspects of the human psyche.

The application of Freud's and Lacan's theories in this study is not arbitrary but a deliberate choice to provide a robust theoretical framework. Freud's ideas, for instance, shed light on how capitalist dynamics influence the human psyche in contemporary life, exploiting both these drives' creative and destructive aspects. According to Freud, much of humanity's history has been about creating ways to civilize and restrain the spontaneous outbursts of these drives. This study further explores how capitalism exploits and shapes subconscious drives to construct a capitalist world. The 'capitalist world' concept is intricately linked to Jacques Lacan's notion of the 'ontological void,' which provides a deep insight into the psychological underpinnings of capitalist societies. Lacan's ontological void refers to an inherent gap or lack within the human psyche, a fundamental emptiness individuals perpetually strive to fill. This void is a central element in Lacan's theory of psychoanalysis, reflecting the unattainable nature of complete self-fulfillment or wholeness.

In the context of a capitalist world, the significance of this ontological void is amplified. Capitalism, as a system, capitalizes on this inherent sense of lack by promoting a perpetual pursuit of material wealth and consumer goods. Capitalist ideology suggests that fulfillment can be attained through acquisition and consumption. However, since the void is fundamentally unfillable, this pursuit only leads to temporary satisfaction, followed by renewed desire. This repetitive cycle of temporary satisfaction and renewed desire, which is the hallmark of consumerism, not only fuels the dynamics of capitalist economies but also perpetuates a cycle that is both familiar and unfulfilling.

Thus, the connection between Lacan's concept and the capitalist world reveals that economic principles do not solely drive capitalism. It profoundly engages with human psychology, particularly the ontological void. Capitalism manipulates this void by offering an illusion of fulfillment through materialism, thereby sustaining its cycle of consumption and production. This linkage explains why, despite increasing consumption levels, societies often report widespread dissatisfaction and emptiness—reflective of the unmet ontological void that Lacan describes.

Capitalism and the Human Psyche

Capitalism fosters an environment where the pursuit of material wealth and status is not only encouraged but is also a driving force for individual behavior. This system's profound influence on both personal and societal well-being has emerged as a significant issue. Particularly in Western societies like the United States and the U.K that have suffered the most under the weight of neoliberalism. Capitalism has dramatically affected social cohesion, eroded the foundations of social contracts, and hindered the development of strong personal relationships and stable identities. Central to this dynamic is consumerism, and the endless demand for acquisition of material goods, a technocratic ethos aided by instrumental rationality that emphasize efficiency and effectiveness in achieving specific goals that reduces human interactions and societal aims to mere calculations of efficiency and utility, removing the core values that nurture authentic human connections. It evaluates actions based on the outcome rather than ethical or intrinsic values, often disregarding broader societal or moral implications.

Barry Smart's (2003) analysis underscores a defining characteristic of a [capitalist] technocratic society: the way rapid technological advancements reshape social norms and values. In this context, relationships between people increasingly take on the form of economic transactions. This shift means social interactions are often assessed from a cost-benefit perspective, prioritizing efficiency and utility. As a result, human relations become commodified. Moreover, the rise of digital platforms and the gig economy intensifies this trend by blending personal and professional spheres, creating a culture where even routine interactions are influenced by economic incentives and a transactional perspective.

Karl Marx is renowned for his profound analysis of capitalism's social and economic structures. He observed that the emergence of commodities and the production systems centered around them, coupled with the principle of exchange value, started to dominate and transform all aspects of social relationships (Smart,2003, p.9). Today, this influence has intensified, fostering an environment where rational calculation, self-interest, and competitive individualism are paramount (Smart,2003, p.9). The commercialized competitive mindset extends beyond the marketplace, infiltrating public actions and personal interactions (Smart,2003, p.9). The pervasive nature of this outlook encourages people to evaluate their relationships and decisions through a lens of efficiency and personal gain, often at the expense of communal values and altruistic behaviors. Furthermore, with the rise of digital technologies and the gig economy, these dynamics are even more pronounced, leading to blurred lines between professional and private lives, where every interaction is potentially commodifiable.

Callon (1998) contends that Homo economicus is not merely a theoretical concept but manifests in various forms (Smart, 2003, pp. 7-8). In the late eighteenth century, we witnessed a pivotal transition from regulated to self-regulated markets, fundamentally altering societal structures (Smart, 2003, p. 29). This societal transformation highlights how deeply our culture has adapted to economic principles, embracing the division of labor, commodification by class, and utilitarianism.

According to Peterson (1996), the economic realm has increasingly become politicized. Citizens are now seen as clients in a relationship with an increasingly corporatist state, whose services are unreliable yet increasingly necessary, heightening their dependency (Peterson, 1996, pp. 231-232). When political and economic decisions are made, they are often handled by experts who assert that their actions are based on objective facts. Consequently, this approach sidelines citizens, stripping them of an active role in decision-making (Peterson,1996, p.234). Instead, citizens are transformed into passive observers or "citizens as spectators," that watch decisions unfold and depend on experts for their implementation. This significantly reduces their active participation in governance (Peterson,1996, p.234).

The concept of "citizens as spectators" model, people act more as an audience to the decisions and narratives shaped by leaders, with limited roles in policy-making or direct democracy. Politics, for example, citizens often act as passive viewers during televised debates and news broadcasts. Economically, they encounter manipulations through advertising, public relations, personnel management, and scientific management (Peterson, 1996, p. 237). These areas demonstrate how interpretive frameworks are constructed and imposed, how images and associations are manipulated, and how calculated rhetoric replaces more substantive rationalities (bureaucratic, economic) to influence how citizens relate to political agency (Peterson, 1996, p. 237). Such political mediations not only provide social interpretations but also shape the interpretive abilities of individuals, encouraging them to accept passive roles and highlighting the necessity for social experts (Peterson, 1996, pp. 237-238). This kind of passive spectatorship can lead to disengagement and concerns about the health and accountability of a democracy, contrasting with models where citizens have significant influence and involvement.

Sayer (1999) observes that the concept of homo capitalisticus, which embodies the principles of capitalism, has become a universal paradigm (Smart, 2003, p. 8). That suggests that behaviors driven by the relentless pursuit of economic gain are now prevalent across all facets of life. In addition, Polanyi (1968) adds that:

It means no less than the running of society as an adjunct to the market...society must be shaped in such a manner as to allow the system to function according to its own laws ... [for] a market economy can function only in a market society

(As Quoted in Smart,2003, p.29).

One of the critical difficulties in discussing capitalism is defining it clearly (Downs,2022). Capitalism is incredibly flexible, constantly adapting and reshaping itself (Downs,2022, para. 11). How do we define a system so adept at incorporating differences? It commodifies everything, a point critiqued by thinkers like Debord, assimilating differences while neutralizing their disruptive potential (Downs,2022, para.11). Both proponents and critics agree that capitalism places the free market at society's core, dictating outcomes (Downs,2022, para.11).

Yet, as Downs points out, this analysis does not fully capture the allure of capitalism. To truly comprehend capitalism, we must delve into its libidinal appeal, where its true essence resides (Downs,2022, para.11). McGowan posits that to grasp capitalism's libidinal rewards, we must detach it from culture. Capitalism, indifferent to culture, utilizes it solely for its own benefit (Downs,2022, para.11). According to McGowan, capitalism is a universal system, not inherently Eurocentric, and remains fundamentally the same across different countries (Downs,2022,

para.12). While capitalism strives for perpetual growth, culture provides identity and social cohesion. This dichotomy creates a tension between the allure of capitalism and the stability offered by cultural identity (Downs,2022, para.12).

Capitalism not only defines our place within the societal structure but also imposes a significant societal pressure, instructing us on how to conform to its expectations (Downs,2022, p.36). It leaves little room for actions that do not align with these societal demands (Downs,2022, p.36). In other words, if you want to succeed, then you must fall in line. Our choices and actions are largely dictated by what is required by society, and capitalism is highly effective at clarifying these requirements (Downs,2022, p.36). Although we might think we have the autonomy to select our careers — as the economist Friedrich Hayek asserts — capitalism simplifies this process for us. It effectively guides us on where to focus our efforts, alleviating the burden of making these decisions independently (Downs,2022, p.36).

Capitalism's allure lies in its ability to align with human desires (Downs,2022, para.14). As McGowan points out, it encourages us to pursue our self-interests without questioning their nature or origin, presenting itself as the economic system most in tune with our biological instincts (Downs,2022, p.36). This alignment with self-interest lends capitalism an air of naturalness, making it seem closely connected to human nature (Downs,2022, p.36). However, Sigmund Freud's concept of the death drive poses a significant challenge to this notion, suggesting that humans are not solely driven by rational self-interest but also by a fundamental inclination towards self-destructive behaviors (Downs,2022, p.20). This contradiction calls for a deeper exploration of the relationship between capitalism and human nature.

For example, capitalism, by tapping into the death drive, promotes the relentless acquisition of soon-to-be-obsolete products and the voluntary surrender of privacy on social media for connectivity and social approval. These behaviors, while fueling economic growth and data-driven business models, are personally and environmentally detrimental in the long term. This stark reality underscores capitalism's capacity to thrive on human tendencies that may not align with individual or collective well-being, highlighting the adaptability and dangers of capitalist systems in relation to the psychoanalytic concept of the death drive.

In essence, while capitalism appears to champion rational self-interest as a natural extension of human instincts, it also plays a significant role in exploiting the more irrational and self-sabotaging tendencies within us. This duality allows capitalism to sustain itself, not merely by appealing to logical self-advancement but also by tapping into the deeper, often unconscious drives that compel us to act against our immediate self-interest. Thus, the system remains robust by aligning itself with the full spectrum of human motivations, from the rational to the irrational.

Freud's psychoanalytic theory of the death drive offers a deeper understanding of human nature's self-destructive tendencies. Freud's notion of the death drive describes an instinctual pull toward destruction, chaos, and aggression that exists in every individual civilization and courses through every society's collective consciousness. Contrasting the death drive with the survival and creative instincts, we see a complex interplay of these forces within the human psyche. The notion that humans might initially possess an inherent tendency toward self-destruction seems contradictory to the fundamental survival instinct that drives humanity (Hageback,2020). At first glance, it appears absurd because the desire to preserve one's life is a powerful and universal aspect of human nature (Hageback,2020, p.37). The death drive is an innate part of the human psyche that seeks out destruction and chaos, while the survival and creative instincts are an intrinsic part of the human psyche that seeks survival and creation.

The death drive can be seen as the opposite of these instincts, as it seeks to challenge and disrupt them. According to Freud, the death drive can lead to self-destructive behaviors and a desire for aggression. In contrast, life instincts seek to promote the collective preservation of society; according to Rose (2019), the self-preservation of individuals and the pursuit of pleasure [through consumption] and other meaning-making acts designed to create a sense of unity by rallying around what Žižek calls a "sublime object of ideology"—an entity like Coca-Cola, the Marlboro Man, "God," "Country," "Party," or "Class." (p.63). These sublime objects of ideology function as empty signifiers that societies invest with profound significance, enabling individuals to feel connected to a larger collective. By anchoring social identity to these objects, societies can mask underlying social, economic, and political contradictions, creating an illusion of harmony and shared purpose (Rose,2019, p.63).

Additionally, these objects hold power as universally recognized symbols that transcend individual differences. For example, "Country" can unite diverse people under a shared national identity, while brands like Coca-Cola evoke a sense of global community. The attachment leads to forming rituals, traditions, and practices that reinforce their significance, such as national holidays, brand loyalty, and religious ceremonies, solidifying their role in maintaining social cohesion.

Our materialistic pursuits, desire for success, and daily routines lack inherent value. These actions demonstrate that our quest for meaning, and purpose is based on activities that are fundamentally meaningless. The importance we assign to these endeavors is a product of our interpretation, and finding value in otherwise ordinary actions is ultimately unsustainable. In essence, Žižek argues that the societal structure mirrors individual consciousness, as both contain a fundamental, distressing void at their core (Rose, 2019, p.67). This void signifies

an intrinsic absence or inadequacy, a void that neither the individual nor society can fully overcome, resulting in a perpetual state of unease and discontent (Rose, 2019, p.67).

Capitalism and the Ontological Void

For Freud, much of humanity's history is about creating ways to civilize and restrain the spontaneous outbursts of drives. Both individuals and society are seen as "failed Wholes," constantly striving for completeness but never achieving it. Modern neoliberal capitalist societies seek to conceal this inherent failure by creating a fantasy that conceals the gap between reality and ideals. The underlying condition is that material reality, individuals, and society all share a common feature: they are all shaped by underlying drives or motivations. According to Rose (2019, p. 68), these drives play a fundamental role in organizing and influencing the structure of each of these domains. The fantasy begins with the idea that a sublime symbol of social harmony is material success, achieved by accumulating wealth and status. This idealized concept suggests that a perfect, prosperous society is possible through investment in human capital, hard work, and a willingness to compete. It leads people to believe that harmony and success are attainable through these efforts. Second, neoliberal capitalism introduces the scapegoat: individuals or groups blamed for failing to achieve harmony and success. They are seen as at fault for not meeting the requirements of self-investment and hard work. By attributing failure to these individuals or groups, society covers up its inherent flaws and maintains the illusion of potential completeness and order.

Sussman (2011) highlights how capitalism shapes a culture overly influenced by commercial values, portraying these as the primary goals of existence. People are conditioned from an early age to accept consumerist values. They view competition for limited resources as crucial to achieving personal satisfaction and the freedom to pursue capitalist goals. Under neoliberalism, capitalism becomes not just an economic system but a form of life. Its influence permeates every aspect of life, transforming it into more than just an economic system. Political engagement and meaningful discourse wane as economic priorities overshadow them, and social connections deteriorate as people prioritize economic success over community and relationships. While liberal democracy professes to champion liberal values, it frequently falls short, practicing illiberal policies that exacerbate cultural conflicts and identity crises. This complex interplay of weakened politics eroded social bonds, and the paradox of illiberal liberalism lies at the heart of our contemporary cultural and identity struggles.

Capitalism serves not merely as an economic system but also as a generator of meaning through innovation, value creation, and the selective interpretation and reinforcement of specific social practices while sidelining others. For instance, the creation of new technologies and the development of new industries can be seen as forms of innovation and value creation. It operates on the premise that acquiring material possessions can address the existential void and sense of meaninglessness, thus providing our lives with tangible substance and direction (Demur, 2013, p.7). Thus, capitalism seeks to serve our deepest, often subconscious desires, manifested through direct human interactions within our social networks and the objects we accumulate (Demur, 2013, p.7). These material goods do more than generate profit; they symbolically represent and fulfill our innermost needs and aspirations. In this way, consumerism becomes an integral part of how individuals seek identity and community in the modern world.

Lacan argued that our unconscious drives are complex and shaped by our social and linguistic environments, intertwining with cultural symbols and historical narratives that influence how we internalize and express societal norms (Demur, 2013). In the neoliberal era, capitalism must manage public consciousness to sustain ideologies that justify social and economic disparities, promoting consumerism and economic growth to quell dissent (Sussman, 2011). French economist Bernard Maris, a French economist, posits that capitalism does not merely suppress destructive impulses but redirects them toward activities that support the economic system, such as the relentless drive to consume and perpetual economic competition (Han, 2022). Maris notes that redirection is facilitated not through coercion or authoritarian means, but by tapping into and redirecting human impulses by the creation of new consumer desires, mainly through [distractions like sports and game shows], social media, and advertising (Han, 2022, p.2

The continuous drive towards materialism obscures what theorists like Jacques Lacan, Julia Kristeva, and Melanie Klein identify as a fundamental void within the individual. In this void, the individual perceives the loss of something profoundly valuable (Ruti, 2024). They argue that the individual's fantasy about this lost 'thing' helps sustain the hope of someday retrieving what he and others perceive as lost (Ruti, 2024, p. 9). However, since the 'Thing-in-itself' is unattainable, the best approach is to either create or discover replacements: items either crafted or found that offer a subtle, enigmatic hint of the Thing's essence, which can somewhat mitigate our feelings of disappointment and disorientation (Ruti, 2024, p. 9). Objects that evoke a sense of this elusive Thing incorporate what Lacan refers to as the 'objet a'. The 'objet a' is a concept in Lacanian psychoanalysis that represents the object of desire, the cause of our desire, and the object that we believe will fulfill our desire. Lacan explains that the 'objet a'—another creation of our fantasy—is not an inherent part of our desired object. Rather, it's a fragment of the Thing that we fictitiously embed within the object to make it appear uniquely luminous. Thus, while we might think the object itself drives our desire, it is, in fact, the 'objet a' that we have placed within it that genuinely

activates our desire (Ruti, 2024, p. 9).

However, this unrelenting pursuit of materialism masked what Jacques Lacan, Julia Kristeva, and Melanie Klein recognize as a constitutive lack in the subject where he imagines having lost something of great value (Ruti,2024). Moreover, they say the subject fantasy of the thing allows him to imagine that one day we may recover what he and we imagine having lost (Ruti,2024, p.9). However, because the Thing-in-itself is unavailable, the best we can do is to create or discover substitutes for it: objects that we either invent or find in the world and that carry a furtive, cryptic, or shadowy intimation of the Thing aura can to some extent alleviate our feeling of disappointment, disenchantment, and dislocation (Ruti,2024, p.9).

In this sense, even though we believe that our object is the cause of our desire, in reality, we have, without realizing it, manipulated the situation in such a way that it is the objet a which we installed in the object – mobilize our desire (Ruti,2024, p.9)

Unfortunately, nothing is more accessible than taking advantage of our yearning for wholeness in order to commercialize our desire; capitalism thrives on this state of affairs (Ruti,2024, p.9). As Todd McGowan (2016) cogently notes, despite appearances to the contrary, the point of capitalism is not to satisfy us but to dissatisfy us (and keep dissatisfying us indefinitely (Ruti,2024, p.9). It is not true that capitalism offers us no satisfaction. Instead, its genius resides in its ability to offer us just enough satisfaction to make us believe that greater satisfaction is available if we keep looking for it (Ruti,2024, p.9). This promise of greater satisfaction entices us to repeatedly return to the stores in the hope that among the seductive, dazzling objects skillfully displayed awaits one that will offer us the satisfaction we seek (Ruti,2024, p.9). However, because our ontological lack is ultimately unfillable, we merely fill the coffers of the all-too-clever capitalist (Ruti,2024, p.9).

Simply put, the Lacan credo that the only "cure" for our constitutive (foundational) lack is to recognize that there is no cure; in more philosophical terms, one could say that exchanging the ideal of transcendence beyond the world for an ideal of transcendence within the world renders a degree of fulfillment obtainable (Ruti,2024, p.15). For some Lacanians, accepting the reality that there is no cure for our existential malaise should keep us from wasting our lives in chasing the untenable goal of healing our lack. However, it should lead us to mistrust the promise of satisfaction that the objects offer, which is why some very prominent Lacans privilege the destructiveness of the drive over the lure of desires (Ruti,2024, p.10).

Regrettably, the desire for completeness is often exploited for marketing purposes, convincing us that more satisfaction is possible if we continue searching for it (Ruti, 2024, p. 9). This illusion of greater satisfaction lures us back to stores, shopping malls, and online purchases, chasing elusive objects among alluring displays that we hope will finally fulfill our desires (Ruti, 2024, p. 9). However, since our fundamental void is inherently unfillable, our attempts merely enrich the savvy capitalist instead of satisfying our needs (Ruti, 2024, p. 9).

Neoliberal Capitalism Ideology

Consumer societies, with their focus on extreme individualism, not only foster shallow cultures and individuals devoid of meaningful life frameworks or a sense of purpose, but also contributes and propagates a profound sense of emptiness. The heightened focus on the self can reduce empathy for others and disregard for the common good. As a result, societal bonds and collective responsibilities diminish, leading to societal fragmentation and a weakened sense of shared purpose, further deepening the ontological void. Moreover, atomistic individualism is only viable in a society that has embraced neoliberal consumerist norms, prioritizing market values over social cohesion (Prusik, 2020, p.39). The appearance of the atomized individual comes at the cost of society. As Lotz puts it:

Society itself appears to its members as something that exists only for them, for their interests." This self-interest is objectively contradicted, however, by the objective dependency of individuals and institutions on earth on all other individuals and institutions. Today's neoliberal order is an abstract conceptuality, a totality where everything can be exchanged for everything. "It occurs to nobody ... "that there might be services that are not expressible in terms of exchange value." The process of neoliberal rationalization, of the extension of markets on a planetary scale (e.g., in biotechnology, intellectual property rights, and the privatization of the environment), indexes the total subsumption of life under the commodity-form

(As Quoted in Prusik,2020, p.39).

The appearance of the market society paradoxically means the end of the individual. Reflects a profound critique of how market-driven societies can undermine individuality despite ostensibly promoting individual freedom and choice. In a market society, every aspect of life, including personal identity and human relationships, tends to be commodified and governed by market logic. That can lead to a paradox where individuals, while

seemingly free to make choices and pursue personal preferences, actually find their options and behaviors increasingly shaped by market forces. The market does not necessarily cater to genuine individual needs or desires but rather to what is most profitable or marketable.

The commodification of life means that individuals are often valued not for their unique qualities or contributions but for their ability to consume and produce within the economy. Personal worth becomes closely tied to economic worth. Therefore, individuality is paradoxically diminished in a market society as people become more like "economic units" than fully realized individuals with diverse interests and intrinsic worth beyond their economic contributions.

Neoliberalism's efficacy can be attributed in part to the assimilation of consumerist norms and ideology by neoliberal subjects. This demographic is encouraged, as consumers, to fulfill their desires and pursue self-interest. These appeals to personal desires have contributed to the widespread acceptance and dominance of neoliberalism. It is widely recognized and accepted that personal interests significantly influence political viewpoints. This notion is echoed in Adam Smith's influential book on economics, *The Wealth of Nations*, where he states,

It is not from the benevolence of the butcher, the brewer, or the baker that we expect our dinner, but from their regard of their own interest, so that, in our dealings with our fellow, 'We address ourselves, not their humanity, but to their self-love, and never to them of our own necessities but of their advantages,'

(As Quoted in Smith, 2005, p.29).

Smith references this idea to highlight how self-interest motivates human actions within economic frameworks. The core concept is that people engage in trade not to help others but to fulfill their needs and advantages, thus fostering economic interactions that benefit all parties involved. This principle is foundational to the understanding of market economies and the division of labor, where each participant's pursuit of personal gain contributes to the overall wealth and functioning of society.

Ideology, a term often used but not always clearly understood, is a set of beliefs, values, and ideas that shape and are shaped by societal relationships and the structural environments they inhabit (Bailes, 2020, p.16). Ideology serves as a powerful motivator for human behavior, driving individuals to perform acts of extreme brutality, as well as remarkable generosity and bravery, often in the name of abstract belief systems (Jost & Amodio 2012). However, ideologies are not static; they can transcend and contest these frameworks (Bailes, 2020, p.16). For ideologies to remain viable, they must provide a sense of fulfillment while repressing alternative viewpoints (Bailes, 2020, p.16).

It is crucial for a comprehensive ideological analysis that extends beyond simple belief systems to examine the connections among ideological content, its roles, and the underlying social frameworks (Bailes, 2020, p.3). In psychoanalytic terms, consciousness gets based on an unconscious commitment to social norms and language, which helps establish a stable sense of meaning (Bailes, 2020, p.3). Our capacity to think about our situations and identities assumes that we are shaped as individuals by these social standards (Bailes, 2020, p.3), of which self-interest is one.

At its core, psychoanalysis explores the unconscious drives and desires that influence human behavior. When applied to consumerism, it reveals how self-interest is not merely a rational pursuit of personal gain but is deeply intertwined with unconscious motivations, anxieties, and desires. The pursuit of self-interest in consumerism can also be understood through the lens of narcissism. Modern marketing strategies often appeal to the narcissistic aspects of the self, promoting products to enhance one's attractiveness, status, or self-worth. This appeal to vanity and self-esteem reinforces the cycle of consumption.

According to Ha-Joon Chang (2010), although self-interest is undeniably a significant trait in many people, it is not the sole driving force behind human behavior, and often, it is not even the most dominant one. If society were populated entirely by the self-centered individuals described in economics textbooks, it would quickly become dysfunctional (Chang, 2010, p.42). We would spend a copious amount of time engaging in deceit, monitoring for deceit, and penalizing the deceivers (Chang, 2010, p.42).

The world does not operate solely on the basis of self-interest, as free-market economics might suggest (Chang, 2010, p.42). To create a thriving economic system, we must acknowledge that while self-interest is a motivator, it is not the sole one. People are driven by a multitude of motivations, including altruism, social cooperation, and a desire for fairness (Chang, 2010, p.42). By designing economic systems that harness these diverse motivations, we can foster environments where individuals are encouraged to contribute positively and collaboratively (Chang, 2010, p.42).

Recognition of diverse motivations in economic systems offers a fresh perspective, suggesting that expecting the worst in people tends to result in negative consequences. In contrast, systems that trust and emphasize the positive traits of human nature tend to inspire and elicit the best in everyone. When individuals are given the benefit of the doubt, they often feel more appreciated and valued. This sense of being valued can enhance motivation, creativity, and cooperation.

The Cultural Turn and Technocracy

Christopher Lasch's analysis in "The Culture of Narcissism" (1979) and further elaborations by Bombardelli (2016) outline a critical transformation in American society, tracing the shift from a materialistic to a technocratic framework. That evolution, driven by technological advancements, was reflected in changes in societal values from tangible goods, which once symbolized conformity and social status, to a more individualistic focus. Hageback (2020) noted that a prolonged era of prosperity catalyzed an excessive preoccupation with material wealth, altering allegiance from collective state goals to personal ambitions. Sir John Glubb in "The Fate of Empires" (1978) argues that these societal shifts transform social and cultural values, even transformed the types of heroes that society venerates. Initially, society revered figures such as builders, soldiers, pioneers, and explorers—individuals whose achievements were rooted in bravery, leadership, and innovation (Hageback,2020, p.87). Over time, however, the focus has shifted towards athletes, musicians, and actors, whose personal lives may be marred by scandals yet remain celebrated (Hageback,2020, p.87).

As Lasch detailed, in addition to the cultural turn, a significant shift emerged from this material engagement toward a technocratic regime where technical experts and technology guide decision-making, sidelining traditional economic and social priorities (Clark,2022, para.2). The evolution also work to produce a narcissistic culture characterized by prioritization of the self, while enhancing individual agency, simultaneously risks eroding community ties and collective responsibilities, marking a profound change in societal values and interactions (Clark,2022, para.2).

Lasch's interpretation of narcissism deviates from its common modern perception as described by psychologists, which often includes traits like self-absorption, a lack of empathy, a sense of entitlement, and a need for admiration (Clark, 2022, para.3). Instead, Lasch's view is more in line with Sigmund Freud's psychoanalysis view. The psychoanalysis view defines narcissism as a condition where individuals cannot differentiate themselves from their environment, making it difficult for them to empathize or connect with anything outside their own experiences (Clark, 2022, para.3). Consequently, efforts aimed at enhancing the collective social life or improving the world is met with indifference. In this context, political engagement increasingly becomes a means for individual promotion and self-enhancement (Clark,2022, para.3).

In his 1984 book, "The Minimal Self: Psychic Survival in Troubled Times," Christopher Lasch expands upon his analyses in "The Culture of Narcissism." He observes that individuals, perceiving an increasing instability and unpredictability in the world around them, have shifted their focus towards self-preservation (Clark, 2022, para.4). This shift manifests in a heightened emphasis on self-care, therapy, and personal growth. Consequently, this inward turn is a defense mechanism against the complexities of the modern world, influencing how individuals engage with society and reducing their participation in broader communal or political efforts. (Clark, 2022, para.4). Lasch highlighted that the trend towards a survival-centric society has gradually emerged for decades, gaining momentum and wider acknowledgment over time. His analysis delves into the psychological shifts and cultural reorientations that coincide with this trend (Clark, 2022). In such a society, individuals often feel powerless to initiate social change, fostering a sense of futility and resignation (Clark, 2022). Glubb observes that this societal mindset breeds pessimism and irresponsibility among the populace and its leaders. A pervasive cynicism infiltrates the social fabric, leading to disengagement from proactive problem-solving (Hageback, 2020).

This disengagement manifests in an increased consumption of superficial entertainments and a pursuit of hedonistic pleasures, such as extravagant living, sexual excesses, and rampant drug and alcohol use (Hageback, 2020). These behaviors can be seen as both symptoms and coping mechanisms in a society that feels increasingly disconnected from its ability to influence or improve its circumstances. The focus on immediate gratification and escape reflects profound societal and existential anxieties, underlining the pressing need to reevaluate societal values and address this cultural malaise's underlying causes.

Mindless entertainment can harm society by promoting passive consumption and distracting individuals from essential issues. Instead of seeking solutions and actively participating in their communities, people may become disengaged and apathetic, leading to a breakdown in social cohesion and a lack of progress.

Lasch also observed that under various societal pressures, people tend to strip their identities down to a minimal, defensive state designed to endure hardships (Clark, 2022, para.4). The minimal self, he suggests, is central to understanding narcissistic behavior, which he describes as a paradoxical mix of striving for autonomy and engaging in self-destructive actions (Clark, 2022, para.4). According to Lasch, these behaviors stem from a deep-seated, primal urge to feel unified with the external world, which can manifest as both self-preservation and self-destruction (Clark, 2022, para.4).

The emergence of a narcissistic culture where decision-making processes are often driven by self-interest and personal gain rather than considering the needs and well-being of others. The rise of a technocratic regime emphasizing "instrumental reason," prioritizing efficiency, control, and technical rationality, has led to policies and decisions prioritizing short-term benefits and superficial appearances rather than addressing individuals' and communities' complex and nuanced realities. As a result, the disconnect between decision-makers and the lived experiences and values of the people they are meant to serve becomes even more pronounced.

This disconnect can cause social alienation and a loss of meaningful engagement with social requirements and democratic processes. For example, consider the implementation of standardized testing in education systems. Driven by a technocratic approach, standardized testing is designed to measure student performance efficiently through quantitative means. While it aims to ensure accountability and improve educational outcomes, this policy often neglects individual students' diverse needs, backgrounds, and learning styles.

As a result, teachers may feel pressured to "teach to the test," prioritizing test scores over holistic education and critical thinking. Students, in turn, may experience increased stress and disengagement from the learning process as their unique talents and interests get undervalued. This approach can alienate students, parents, and educators from the educational system, reducing meaningful engagement and undermining the broader goals of education, such as fostering creativity, emotional intelligence, and social skills.

Psychologists have delved into the realm of collective narcissism, employing a powerful tool known as the "Implicit Association Test" (IAT) (Jarrett, 2017). This test, which involves participants categorizing words using keyboard keys, is based on the principle that people respond more swiftly when the same key is used for categories, they mentally associate (Jarrett, 2017, para. 4). For instance, individuals with high self-esteem will react more rapidly when sorting both positive words and self-referential words using the same key (Jarrett, 2017, para. 4). This test, therefore, plays a crucial role in our understanding of collective narcissism.

When applying the IAT to the study of collective narcissism, Polish individuals displaying collective narcissism tendencies were found to be slower than average at associating Polish symbols with positive words (Jarrett, 2017, para. 5). Despite debates about the interpretation of the IAT, these results suggest that Polish collective narcissists did not entirely view their national group positively. This could explain their strong need for external validation of their country's worth (Jarrett, 2017, para. 5).

Additional evidence suggests that certain characteristics of collective narcissism arise as compensation for feelings of personal inadequacy, much like how individual narcissists flaunt their self-importance to conceal their anxiety (Jarrett, 2017, para. 6). Aleksandra Cichocka and her team at the University of Warsaw recently discovered that individuals who felt less control over their lives were more likely to exhibit signs of collective narcissism (Jarrett, 2017, para. 6). In a similar vein, the researchers found that they could increase participants' collective narcissism scores by prompting them to recall times in their lives when they lacked control (Jarrett, 2017, para. 7). Conversely, encouraging participants to think about times when they had control reduced their collective narcissism (Jarrett, 2017, para. 7).

Hageback (2019, p.112) contends that the widespread commitment to various political ideologies and religious affiliations, driven by the death drive, should be understood from a psychological perspective rather than as genuine political or religious beliefs (p.112). Participation in these movements allows individuals to engage in destructive and punitive actions, which are fundamental to the death drive. These behaviors are often pursued with enthusiasm because they provide a sense of psychological renewal (Hageback, 2019, p.112).

Therefore, the crux of the matter lies not in the actual political or religious ideologies, but in the impulse to dismantle and eradicate barriers to psychological contentment (Hageback, 2019, p.112). This explains the use of basic and unsophisticated slogans by these movements; a comprehensive understanding of the issues is not necessary because the fundamental drive is towards destruction, which is at the heart of their psychological foundation (Hageback, 2019, p.112). In societies that lack genuine individualism and exhibit significant deficits in independent thinking and creativity, a culture with low levels of awareness emerges. These societies tend to revert to a collective identity and groupthink, which effectively alienates individuals from their unique characteristics (Hageback, 2019, p.112).

Often, collective ideologies target the common individual, disallowing all forms of distinction, and escalate violence against scapegoat groups. The severity of these actions correlates with the intensity of the death drive (Hageback, 2019, p. 112-113). Driven by a destructive fixation, such ideologies cultivate an "us versus them" mindset, incessantly seeking out scapegoats to blame. They call for the elimination of all elements deemed impure, perceiving them as hindrances to creating an ideal society, whether it's a worker's paradise, a caliphate, or a thousand-year Reich (Hageback, 2019, p. 113).

They use euphemisms to criminalize forbidden thoughts effectively by banning certain words or books (Hageback, 2019, p.113). In this way, independent thinking is stifled. The absence of critical thinking can result in infantilism and dormancy, where everything that challenges the accepted worldview is ignored and silenced (Hageback, 2019, p.113).

Research, spanning five studies, unequivocally demonstrates that collective narcissism, distinct from individual narcissism, is a robust predictor of intergroup aggressiveness (Zavala et al., 2009). The trait is associated with high private collective self-esteem, low public collective self-esteem, and a significant reduction in implicit group esteem (Zavala et al., 2009, P.2). These findings highlight a perceived threat from outgroups, a reluctance to forgive outgroups, a preference for military aggression over social dominance orientation, right-wing authoritarianism, and uncritical patriotism (Zavala et al., 2009, p.2). In a broader context, collective narcissism expands individual narcissism to the social aspects of the self, glorifying the in-group over the individual self (Zavala et al., 2009, p.2).

Hornsey (2003) proposes a positive correlation between individual and collective narcissism, as the self-concept encompasses personal and social identities linked to group membership (Zavala et al., 2009, p. 2). This self-idealization can extend to the idealization of one's in-groups. Gramzow and Gaertner (2005) note that the evaluation of new in-groups, formed through minimal group paradigm tasks, is influenced by individuals' self-assessments: those with high self-esteem tend to view their new in-groups more positively than those with low self-esteem (Zavala et al., 2009, p. 2). Collective narcissists may perceive groups as extensions of themselves, seeking recognition not only for their greatness but also for their in-group prominence (Zavala et al., 2009, p. 2).

As the repressive society considers evermore topics taboo, in order to uphold the pretext of normality in such an unbalanced environment, delusions serve as a fitting behavior mechanism where they are allowed to form an extreme interpretation of reality to ensure the adherence to dogmatic beliefs. Delusions is a psychiatric term highlighting the manifestations of erroneous ideas about reality, either about oneself or the external world. Collective delusion, typically categorized as mass psychosis or conspiracy theories. What characterizes delusions is that they are expressed with an unusual conviction to the point that any disagreeing evidence will rarely convince one of the conviction's falseness. They come to play a defining part in the life of the individual or collective with humor and irony generally frowned upon, even met with aggression, in particular when the delusional ideas are being challenged

(As Quoted by Hageback,2019, p.113-114).

In "The Culture of Narcissism," Christopher Lasch highlights two significant societal shifts: the transition from material politics to a technocratic society with an excessive focus on material values and the move from state loyalty to a self-centered outlook. Lasch's transformative analysis of American society complements Andrew Feenberg's discussion in "A Critical Theory of Technology" (1991), which argues that modern social life increasingly depends on and resembles scientific and technological processes (Felt et al., 2017).

Feenberg underscores the role of efficiency in a technocratic society, where it is not just a rational principle but a governing force across all aspects of social life (Feenberg,2013). The emphasis on efficiency often termed the 'mantra of efficiency' by Alexander (2008), justifies and masks various social changes (Feenberg,2003, p.3). It promotes a rational approach to problem-solving, leading to the prevalence of technocratic solutions and manipulation as the preferred way to engage with reality (Feenberg,2013, p.3).

According to this theory, capitalism molds human understanding and existence to fit the needs of the economic system, limiting the scope of human experience and interaction. Marcuse argues that when technology becomes the predominant mode of material production, it envelops the whole culture, shaping a comprehensive historical reality—a 'world.' Marcuse suggests that as technology dominates production, it influences all aspects of culture and society, defining how people live and interact (Felt et al.,2017, p.638).

As Lasch observed, the shift toward a technocratic regime where technical experts and technology guide the underway decision-making (Clark,2022, para.2) intensified with the emergence of neoliberalism. Ethical concerns are frequently neglected under neoliberalism, which focuses on technical solutions. Because under neoliberalism, capitalism treats reason merely as a tool for economic gain (Prusik,2020, p.119). Furthermore, Prusik points out that at the heart of this issue is a prevailing attitude that sacrifices other values for future economic benefits, which has become so dominant that it undermines the ability to address societal problems and resist ecological crises effectively, thus endangering environmental sustainability (Prusik,2020, p.119).

As the neoconservative sociologist Daniel Bell highlighted, capitalism contains inherent "cultural contradictions" that may erode its ethical and social structures (Ball & Dagger,2024, para.20). Capitalism relies on behaviors such as saving, investing, and delaying gratification. However, it simultaneously promotes self-indulgence through advertising and marketing, advocating for living on credit and disregarding the distant future (Ball & Dagger,2024, para.20). Moreover, unchecked capitalism increasingly influenced by economic incentives, governed by utilitarian thinking, shaped by the monetization of values, enriching some while leaving great mass of humanity behind cause resentment, giving rise to class tensions, labor conflicts, and political instability (Ball & Dagger,2024, para.20).

Neoliberalism aims to shape a society where economic demands govern moral and ethical decisions, transforming individuals into mere economic units valued solely for their productivity and marketability. Rather than seeing people and objects as isolated entities, it is more advantageous to view them as interconnected participants within networks (Felt et al.,2017, p.638). They view individuals merely as economic units, which can result in a society that prioritizes profit at the expense of human well-being and dignity.

Transforming society into a neoliberal formation involves implementing policies that promote competitiveness and efficiency, prioritizing individual entrepreneurship, and relying on market-based solutions for social and economic issues. This transformation includes restructuring welfare systems into work programs, reforming labor markets, and updating regulatory frameworks. However, the emphasis on deregulation, privatization, and the commodification of services leads to insecurity, anxiety, and a state of perpetual crisis.

These conditions exacerbate psychological struggles tied to the concept of the death drive, as individuals constantly assess their value based on market standards—the death drive, which is evident in policies and practices that contribute to societal and individual disintegration. Transforming society into a neoliberal formation involves implementing policies that promote competitiveness and efficiency, prioritizing individual entrepreneurship, and relying on market-based solutions for social and economic issues.

This transformation involves restructuring welfare systems into work programs designed to assist those at the bottom of society and those struggling to make ends meet amid widespread insecurity, anxiety, and a state of perpetual crisis. These conditions exacerbate psychological struggles tied to the concept of the death drive, as individuals constantly assess their value based on market standards. In this context, the neoliberal transformation of society can be viewed as a macrocosmic reflection of the death drive, evident in policies and practices that contribute to societal and individual disintegration.

The Death Drive and Equanimity

The dynamic between Eros and Thanatos is a foundational concept in Freudian psychoanalysis, reflecting the fundamental human struggle between life-affirming activities and self-destructive tendencies. Freud's theoretical framework helps explain why individuals often experience profound internal conflicts that affect their mental and emotional well-being (Davis, 2020, para.1). Eros is fundamentally about creation, productivity, sexuality, and preservation of life (Davis, 2020, para.1). Expressing sexual impulses in daily life is more complex than it seems due to societal norms that restrict such expressions, causing internal conflict as individuals attempt to balance their natural urges with societal expectations (Davis, 2020, para.1).

Freud's 1915 essay "Repression" highlights how these frustrations of Eros lead to psychological conflicts as people work to adhere to societal rules, especially people of the LGBT, Transgender, and Queer communities. The pressure to conform fuels a dual struggle within the psyche that involves both external social pressures and the internal opposing forces of Thanatos. This force draws us toward the end of life, including behaviors and thoughts centered on destroying our mortality (Davis, 2020, para.1). "

According to Freud, the environment significantly influences human instincts, particularly their balance and dominance (Davis, 2020, p. 1). His concept of the death drive highlights how life experiences and surroundings shape these instincts (Davis, 2020, p. 1). It is this peculiar, unsettling attraction to the brink of peril. Essentially, it describes an underlying, often bewildering pull towards situations or actions that flirt with danger or self-destruction, even if such impulses seem counterintuitive to our instinct for self-preservation. The concept of the death drive suggests that it influences both individuals and collectives, manifesting in behaviors that repeatedly expose people to danger (Davis, 2020, para.3). People who regularly engage in extreme sports, such as free-climbing or skydiving, may unconsciously be flirting with death, pushing their limits until they potentially meet death itself (Davis, 2020, para.3). Additionally, the death drive can be observed in self-destructive habits such as smoking, excessive alcohol consumption, or drug abuse (Davis, 2020, para.3).

The significance of Freud's concepts of Eros (the life instinct) and Thanatos (the death drive) is not as factors that directly determine the manner of our deaths but as pivotal forces shaping our approach to life and our interactions with the world and ourselves (Davis, 2020, para.9). Some individuals internalize this drive by engaging in self-critical and self-deprecating thoughts. This inner critical voice undermines their self-esteem and interrupts positive self-reflection, often leading to a destructive spiral that can culminate in suicidal ideation (Davis, 2020, para.11). The connection between these negative self-perceptions and suicide highlights the dangerous potential of an inwardly directed death drive (Davis, 2020, para.11).



Center for Disease Control and Prevention Suicide data and statistics for 2021.

Source: SAMHSA

Freud's concept of the death drive, a phase of self-destructive behavior experienced by everyone to varying degrees, is a significant lens through which to understand human behavior (Davis, 2020, para.9). This drive, when turned inward, can lead to suicidal thoughts or actions (Davis, 2020, para.9). Comer (2011) highlights an intriguing phenomenon: during times of external conflict, such as war, individuals may be less inclined to harm themselves,

possibly due to a shift in focus towards a collective external threat (Berry,2011, para.5). Conversely, in times of relative peace, when homicide rates are low, suicide rates may increase, potentially because the lack of external threats leads individuals to internalize their destructive impulses (Berry, 2011, para.5).

When the death drive is projected outward, it manifests as aggression toward others (Davis.2020, para.9). This aggressive tendency permeates various aspects of society, including politics and popular culture, leading to online harassment, cruelty towards animals, character assassination among political rivals, and various forms of shaming aimed at degrading others based on their physical appearance or lifestyle choices (Davis.2020, para.10). These behaviors exemplify the outward direction of the death drive, targeting others (Davis.2020, para.10).

It is undeniable that human malevolence stands as one of humanity's gravest and most urgent challenges if our species is to persist. Throughout social history, there exists a relentless continuum of violence, including warfare, mass slaughter, hate crimes at both individual and communal levels, and the profound anguish inflicted upon the countless millions left behind to endure and strive onward (Bartlett,2005, p.4).

Despite their perplexing nature, these actions hint at a psychological pull toward self-annihilation or fulfillment of an innate drive toward death. This raises the question of how an individual life unfolds and ages. According to Freud (1920), the drives for self-preservation, self-assertion, and mastery ensure that the organism follows its path to death (Gaston,2022, p.25). The self-preservation drive allows for the postponement of satisfaction, ensuring growth and safety for the individual before the inevitable dominance of the death drive at the end of life (Gaston,2022, p.25). Freud's insights illuminate how deeply our unconscious desires shape our behaviors and relationships, underscoring that these hidden drives significantly influence our actions, a notion that remains relevant in contemporary society.

In his seminal work "Being and Time" (1962), Heidegger explores the concept of death as an inescapable and defining aspect of human existence (Mills,2006, p.373). He argues that death is not merely a future event to be ignored or postponed but a central element that shapes our being from the moment we are born (Mills,2006, p.373). Heidegger emphasizes that death is inevitable in our lives, not as something to be avoided or deferred but as an integral part of our existence (Mills,2006, p.373).

However, Freud delves deeper; in fact, what he does is a paradigmatic shift suggesting that death is not merely an external. For him, death is much more than that which stands before us; rather, it resides within us.... Here the banality of death is not just something that happens to us; it is us—our inner being

(Mills,2006, p.373).

Freud argues that all individuals possess innate destructive impulses that have the potential to disrupt societal and cultural harmony. In numerous cases, these drives are potent enough to shape one's behavior in a social context (Barlett,2005, p.75). Barlett (2005) suggests that the emotions of aggression often motivate the acts themselves (p.75).

Freud's view shows a notable correlation between the act of aggression and its pleasure (Barlett,2005, p.75). He contends that the power of these basic instincts overshadows human reasoning and cultural progress, rendering them ineffective as deterrents (Barlett,2005, p.75). Freud ultimately asserts that humans, with their modest intellect, are overwhelmingly governed by their instinctual desires (Barlett,2005, p.75).

Freud's innovative interpretation of the death drive as an essential element of our identity offers insight into destructive history. Destructive behaviors are not merely sporadic or superficial. Instead, they are a continual and fundamental aspect of our psychological makeup. The drives are not only about seeking pleasure or comfort but are primarily responses to basic needs that ensure survival. Freud's concept grew more complex with his claim that the death drive is never solitary but invariably merges with Eros (Blüml,2019, p. 4).

So far as the psychoanalytic field of ideas is concerned, we can only assume that a very extensive fusion and amalgamation, in varying proportion, of the two classes of instincts take place, so that we never have to deal with pure life instincts or pure death instincts but only with mixtures of them in different amounts

(As Quoted in Blüml ,2019, p.4).

Freud points out that the challenge in detecting the death drive due to its constant coexistence with Eros, even during events of great destruction, is a fascinating insight into human psychology (Blüml, 2019, p.4). These two primal instincts, not isolated but working in unison, shape behavior in a complex and intriguing manner (Blüml, 2019, p.4). Eros, associated with creativity and life preservation, often intertwines with the death drive, resulting in a blend responsible for the diverse array of behaviors and psychological phenomena that make up the intricate fabric of human experiences (Blüml,2019, p.4).

What happens to death if life takes precedence over it? Freud's conclusion showcases his brilliance, suggesting that death serves the pleasure principle. That subtle and complex theoretical strategy works only when

one understands the dialectical method, where opposing forces are interconnected and share a fundamental unity (Mills,2006, p.379). Take an artist, for example; the artist is driven by Eros, the life drive, manifesting as creativity, passion, and the desire to produce beautiful works of art. However, the artist also experiences periods of self-doubt, destructive behavior, and even a longing for the cessation of the struggle and tension (Thanatos, the death drive). These moments of destruction or self-sabotage are not merely negative; they can lead to a period of reflection and, ultimately, a renewed burst of creative energy. Destruction and creation are interconnected, each influencing and giving meaning to the other.

In this way, the artist's creative process exemplifies the delicate and complex interplay between life and death drives. The moments of despair and self-destruction are necessary parts of the artistic journey, leading to greater creativity and expression. The dialectical relationship between Eros and Thanatos in the artist's life ultimately drives them toward a balanced and meaningful existence, where life-affirming and life-negating forces contribute to their overall sense of purpose and fulfillment. This concept is described as "delicate" and complex because it relies on a dialectical approach, where opposites like life and death are not merely in conflict but are interconnected and part of a greater unity (Mills, 2006, p. 379). In the broader context of human psychology and behavior, elements that seem contradictory, such as life and death, complement each other

According to Freud, all human actions result from unconscious impulses, and unrecognized desires and motivations profoundly affect our actions and decisions (Mills,2006, p.379). If much of what we do is not a result of deliberate, conscious decision-making but rather the manifestation of hidden, underlying forces within our psyche, then it is reasonable to assume that the policies we make. The institutions, organizations, and systems we create will reflect their creators' contradictions, biases, and instincts.

That implies that the structures and systems created by humans, such as the capitalist economy, might naturally embody this destructive impulse. This idea critically examines how the basic principles of capitalism might inherently conflict with the long-term health of our environment and societal structures. It reflects that if our psychological tendencies are skewed towards self-destruction, the systems we build, like capitalism, might also be predisposed to such destructive patterns. That poses significant challenges to achieving long-term global sustainability and peace, as the economic system may prioritize immediate gains over environmental protection and social well-being.

Moreover, given Freud's declaration that "the aim of all life is death, Freud's (1930) "fateful question as to whether cultural development could master the human drive of aggression and self-destruction seems more pressing than ever" (Blüml,2019). Mark Fisher (2009) notes in *Capitalist Realism* that capitalism has no inherent value.

Freud's concept, the philosopher John Lear has pointed out that we need to beware of thinking about the death drive as a "thing" or something we really understand The importance of not interpreting the death drive as a "thing," according to Lear, is that we run the risk of understanding it as a teleological principle that is somehow contrary to teleological Principle that is directed toward human flourishing as its goal, when, in reality, it is the suspension of any teleology as such. The death drive is not ordered toward death as its telos but is, rather a disruption, a disruption, it is devoid of purpose; it is not for anything

(As Quoted in Sigurdson,2017).

As noted, the capitalist death drive is not independent; instead, it embodies a framework that echoes the inherent desires and drives within the capitalist ethos. A system that not only reflects the relentless pursuit of growth and profit but also the insatiable appetite for expansion and accumulation inevitably leads to systemic imbalances and, potentially, self-destruction (Sigurdson,2017, p.89). The capitalist death drive is not a thing in itself; it is not a singular, tangible entity or phenomenon that can be easily isolated and observed. Instead, it is an abstract concept that refers to the cumulative effects or tendencies within capitalist societies (Sigurdson,2017, p.89).

In addition, Norman O. Brown (1959), in his book *Life Against Death*, provides a compelling critique of Goethe's *Faust* that relates to the contemporary feelings of alienation experienced by modern individuals. Brown's themes in *Faust* sheds light on Freud's concept of the death drive and Han's notion of the Capitalist Death Drive. Brown argues that human history is marked by a "Faustian" restlessness, a constant striving for achievement and fulfillment; however, he points out that even when people attain what they consciously desire, it does not lead to proper satisfaction (Berman,1988, p.79). In essence, Brown's analysis suggests that the ceaseless pursuit of desires, symbolized through the character of Faust, mirrors a psychological and cultural pattern where fulfillment leads to further discontent rather than resolution. In "Faust," Johann Wolfgang von Goethe investigates these complex themes of human motivation and dissatisfaction.

Also, "Goethe delves into the complex nature of human motivations, prefiguring ideas later formalized in psychoanalysis (Berman,1988, p.79). He portrays a fundamental human tendency towards self-destructive behaviors, which Sabina Spielrein and Sigmund Freud would later articulate as the "death drive." The protagonist

Faust embodies this through his relentless pursuit of knowledge and experience, leading him into dangerous liaisons with the demonic Mephistopheles (Berman,1988, p.79). The narrative and its exploration of human dissatisfaction and irrationality serve as an early psychological exploration, highlighting Goethe's advanced understanding of the dualistic nature of human drives—both constructive and destructive.

Goethe and Brown interpret this "Faustian restlessness" as a fundamental trait of humanity, a neurosis that plagues human societies, binding them to this destructive pattern. Therefore, the detrimental traits often linked to capitalism, such as its vampiric and zombifying effects on labor, are not essential to the system. Instead, they argue that these practices, which sap workers of their vitality and reduce vibrant work to mechanistic tasks, stripping it of its life essence, reflect the choices and influence of those in power within the system rather than being unavoidable aspects of capitalism (Han,2021, p.9). Under neoliberal capitalism, neither the individual nor the lifeworld has any inherent worth or value other than what capitalism gives them.

The language of capitalism includes terms and phrases that signify its principles and practices. Words like "innovation," "growth," "investment," and "free market" carry connotations that promote capitalist values. Similarly, the narrative of "self-made" success and living the "American Dream" further exemplifies this, celebrating individualism and meritocracy as core aspects of capitalist ideology. These stories reinforce the belief that personal success is achievable for all through hard work and determination, aligning closely with capitalist ideals.

Capitalist signifying practices also manifest in everyday activities. For example, glorifying long working hours as a sign of dedication and commitment is a capitalist ideal that signifies value through productivity. In addition, the socioeconomic status of employers, brands, and consumer goods illustrates how capitalist values are embedded in social practices. Capitalist discourses and social practice produce a distinct form of social life. It is one in which the essence of human activity is considered an opportunity for investment, profit maximization, growth, and competition (Han,2021, p.21). For example, media presentations often personify the stock market, treating it as an indicator of a country's economic health and a predictor of future prosperity. This portrayal gives the stock market cultural and emotional significance beyond its economic role, symbolizing overall societal well-being.

These pursuits are cancerous, harmful to society, and destructive in the workplace. The drive to excel, blending self-validation and self-destruction, pushes us to extremes. For instance, in a corporate setting, the ambition for success (merging the desire for self-affirmation with self-destruction) can drive people to the edge (Han,2021, p.21).

Capitalism fosters a contradictory impulse toward death drive; it strips life of its vitality (Han,2021, p.8), particularly among workers. In a capitalist society, Freud's "death drive" idea argues for exacerbated self-harm, destructive practices, and even death in people (Han,2021, p.8). This inclination encourages damaging labor habits, including overworking, overlooking personal well-being and relationships for career progress, and valuing work as the foremost source of meaning and self-worth, even when it leads to detrimental consequences (Han,2021, p.8).

Terms like "performance zombies," "fitness zombies," and "Botox zombies" symbolize a form of existence that lacks genuine liveliness, suggesting that true life must embrace aspects of death to be considered fully alive, often at the cost of a well-rounded life, leading to an existence devoid of joy and complexity (Han,2021, p.9). Likewise, the same people become fixated on maintaining their youth and attractiveness through cosmetic procedures, resulting in a superficial life guided by a fear of aging (Han,2021, p.9). The capitalist system encourages a culture of intense rivalry, high expectations, and stress, driving individuals to focus excessively on productivity and success (Han,2021, p.9). This obsessive focus on performance can create a life bereft of genuine enthusiasm, creativity, or energy, essentially making these individuals metaphorically 'undead' as they miss out on the full spectrum of life's experiences (Han,2021, p.9).

Zombie movies effectively illustrate an inherent tension within humans, a concept that is universally applicable. According to Sigurdson (2017), what makes zombies appear "inhuman" actually reflects our human qualities—those that distinguish us from mere animals (p.92). To explain this concept, theologian Marcus Pound refers to an episode of "The Simpsons" where Lisa tests if her brother Bart is less intelligent than a hamster (Sigurdson,2017, p.92).

She devises a booby trap with either some food for the hamster or a cupcake for her brother, where the one that tries to obtain it is exposed to an electric shock. After repeated attempts, the hamster learns to avoid the food, whereas Bart persists in reaching for the cupcake until his synapses are burned out. It is this persistence of pleasure beyond anything remotely beneficial for one's own well-being that distinguishes human life from mere instinctual life, and this is why zombies are not just something different from human beings but the terrifying "inhuman" or "undead" core of our innermost being

(Sigurdson,2017, p.92-93).

Sigurdson (2017) argues that zombie films and examples from 'The Simpsons' are not just about foreign creatures, but they also serve as mirrors to our own identities (p.98). He uses the example of Bart Simpson's impulsive pursuit of a cupcake to show how our natural desires can become distorted, just like the mindless hunger of a zombie (Sigurdson,2017, p.98). This 'The Simpsons' example, being a part of our popular culture, makes the analysis more relatable, as it demonstrates how our deepest impulses are shaped and exposed through such distortions, mirroring the fantasies that drive our behavior (Sigurdson,2017, p.98).

He further suggests that our relentless chase for material possessions—like cars houses, or career advancements—does not yield genuine satisfaction (Sigurdson,2017, p.98). Instead, this pursuit only alters and intensifies our desires, ensnaring us in a perpetual cycle of dissatisfaction and longing.

Similarly, Zizek notes that we often believe we are content as long as we are focused on obtaining a particular object of desire (Sigurdson, 2017, p.98). However, when we confront the endless nature of desire, we become disoriented (Sigurdson, 2017, p.98). Zizek further explains that psychoanalysis seeks to unsettle us by deconstructing the illusions that shape our desires, thereby confronting us with our fundamental drives (Sigurdson, 2017, p.98). He describes the relentless pursuit, which can never be fully satisfied, as "sheer negativity." This concept challenges us to face the insatiable aspect of our nature, revealing that our desires are not merely about obtaining objects but are deeply rooted in our psyche's endless quest for something unattainable.

In the context of neoliberal capitalism's destructiveness, the French economist Bernard Maris writes: "The great cunning of capitalism lies in the way it channels, it diverts, the forces of annihilation, the death drive, toward growth" (Han, 2022, p.2). This is achieved not through oppression or authoritarianism but through seduction. The seductive nature of capitalism, as Maris suggests, is particularly fascinating. He proposes that capitalism's success comes not primarily from force or authoritarian control but through enticing and persuading individuals to participate and engage with its systems (Han, 2022, p.2). This seduction manifests through consumer culture, advertising, and the promise of personal success and happiness, effectively transforming potentially negative drives into economic activity and engines of growth. Capitalism perpetuates itself through this subtle yet powerful mechanism of redirection (Han, 2022, p.2).

Freud's concept of the "death drive" (Thanatos) and the "life drive" (Eros) reflects a dual nature, as depicted in Faust. The dual nature of Freud's concept, as depicted in Faust, is particularly intriguing. Despite the risk of eternal damnation, Faust's relentless quest for knowledge and power highlights a human propensity to follow destructive paths in pursuit of transcendental goals. This behavior aligns with Thanatos, suggesting that the ultimate pursuit of money, power, dominance, and even knowledge ironically leads to self-destruction.

"Faust" is a cautionary tale about the perils of unchecked ambition and intellectual arrogance, highlighting the risks of human overreach. Similarly, the impact of artificial intelligence—whether beneficial or harmful—depends on human intentions. These technologies could either enhance freedom and liberation or lead to self-destruction. Ignoring the darker facets of our ambitions and desires risks fulfilling the death drive's aim of returning life to an inorganic state.

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