

POSTMODERNITY AS THANATOS: THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN ILLUSION  
AND NEEDS

A Thesis

by

JAMES BABSON CHOUINARD

Submitted to the Office of Graduate Studies of  
Texas A&M University  
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

MASTER OF SCIENCE

May 2009

Major Subject: Sociology

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Approved by:

Chair of Committee,	Stjepan Mestrovic
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## ABSTRACT

Postmodernity as Thanatos: The Relationship between Illusion and Needs. (May 2009)

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Zygmunt Bauman and other postmodernists have argued that postmodernity is characterized by the disintegration of the legitimacy and authority of what has been referred to as grand narratives or “illusions.” These theorists often highlight the manipulative and obfuscating effects of illusion. As such, scholars like Bauman contend that postmodernity sets the stage for sincere, moral responsibility. However, they fail to acknowledge that these illusions provide a cultural and social function through their satisfaction of human needs. Failing to fully acknowledge the importance of this function and human needs in general leads many postmodern theorists to be unable to adequately theorize about the contemporary epoch.

In addition to the weakening authority of grand illusions, the advent of technologically advanced society coincided with the process of desublimation (a process by which instant gratification occurs). Desublimation worked to undermine what Sigmund Freud has referred to as the life instincts by promulgating false needs (i.e., wants or desires perceived as needs). As such, contemporary society may be depicted as constituting anomic, atomistic individuals seeking self-preservation. This process may

be delineated as the death instincts, or Thanatos, as coming to triumph over the life instincts, Eros.

A Thanatos society has significant implications for moral responsibility. The diminution of sincere emotional integration facilitates the unbridled spread of postemotionalism into more and more spheres of social life. As postemotional scripts become the prevailing moral guidelines, Thanatos manifests itself as a compulsion to repeat destructive behavior at the societal and individual level. Society and its members struggle in their attempts to choose the “right” course of action. Confusion and fear become affixed features of personal and social life and morality becomes an arbitrary endeavor.

## DEDICATION

This thesis is dedicated to Ziegen, Roscoe, my mom and Jenny for all the support they gave me when they were not driving me crazy! I love you guys.

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## CHAPTER I

### INTRODUCTION

#### The Function of Illusion

The following discussion centers on the function of the overarching illusions of society. In addition to describing a relationship among concepts, the use of the term “function” denotes the theoretical orientation of this argument: structural functionalism. In accordance with this perspective, the logic of the following argument will address the following question: how do the concepts in question address (or fail to address) particular needs? More specifically, I argue that the overarching illusions of society serve a particular function in relation to societal and individual needs. In the broadest sense, the nature of this function is to reconcile the needs of the individual to the needs of civilization.

This relationship has been postulated by both Sigmund Freud ([1930]1961; [1927]1961) and Emile Durkheim ([1912] 1961). When discussing religion as an illusion, Durkheim states, “the most bizarre or barbarous rites and the strangest myths translate some human need and some aspect of life, whether social or individual” (2). That is, for Durkheim religion did not represent a false conception of reality; rather, religion reflected real social facts: social forces that compel the individual to behave in a socially prescribed manner. He states,

When I fulfill my obligations as brother, husband, or citizen, when I execute my

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This thesis follows the style of *Theory, Culture and Society*.

contracts, I perform duties which are defined, externally to myself and my acts, in law and in custom. Even if they conform to my own sentiments and I feel their reality subjectively, such reality is still objective, for I did not create them; I merely inherited them through my education. (1982 [1895])

Durkheim argues that religion provides this education<sup>1</sup>. However, through religious practice a set of principles are not merely laid out to serve as guidelines; rather, they, as social facts, are deeply ingrained in the individual's psyche and manifest themselves as a force over the conscience. As such, religion provides individuals with a shared sense of morality and the means by which civilization may flourish. He elaborates,

the faithful believe they are bound to certain ways of acting that the nature of the sacred principle they are dealing with has imposed upon them. Society also fosters in us the sense of perpetual dependence. Precisely because society has its own specific nature that is different from our nature as individuals, it pursues ends that are also specifically its own; but because it can achieve those ends only by working through us, it categorically demands our cooperation. Society requires us to make ourselves its servants, forgetful of our own interests. And it subjects us to all sorts of restraints, privations and sacrifices without which social life would be impossible. And so, at every instant, we must submit to rules of action and thought that we have neither made nor wanted and that sometimes are contrary to our inclinations and to our most basic instincts. ([1912] 1961: 209)

As the above quote illustrates, society, for Durkheim, requires sacrifice, or as Freud would word it, the repression of basic urges. That is, the cooperation needed, on various levels, to maintain civilization requires the subjugation of the individual will to the collective will. The individual must thwart her egoistic interests. She cannot steal from her fellow; rather, she must respect him. She must go further still! She must embrace and protect him, and he must embrace and protect her in turn.

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<sup>1</sup> It is important to note that Durkheim viewed science as a form of religion too. That is, for Durkheim religion was more than a means of deriving moral education, it served as a foundation for the construction of knowledge in general (i.e., he argues that philosophy and science are both made possible by religious thinking (Durkheim [1912] 1995).

To further explicate this need, Durkheim (1933) highlights that the basic unit of society is the family. Even in this most basic unit, egoistic interests must be transcended. Actually, it may be argued that this is the most critical site for the transcendence of egoistic interests. We may state this because children are wholly dependent upon the adults that bring them into the world. The newborn is physically incapable of independently providing for her survival. However, the family's moral obligations to one another extend beyond this initial phase of infant dependence. The family, cooperating as a unit, forms a division of labor at the most basic level.

In this way, the family provides for each other so that they may contribute (presently or in the future) to the greater society. Now it may be said that the bond between mother and child, perhaps even parent and child, is instinctual (and, therefore, in the service of Eros<sup>2</sup>); however, we know of deviant cases in which mother and/or father abandon the other members of the family. It may then be said that there is a need to ingrain either parent with a sense of moral responsibility to their children, to each other, and to their own parents who require support as they grow older. However, this moral obligation (i.e., force) extends beyond the family. That is, it extends to all members of society.

On this note, Durkheim depicted religion as instilling more than a sense of morality in the members of society. It also facilitated solidarity. He explained that religion (through shared belief and values, i.e., totemic symbols) facilitated the means by which the members of society were united through emotional energy (i.e., solidarity).

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<sup>2</sup> We may argue that the maternal instinct is a part of the life instincts (Eros) posited by Freud ([1921] 1961; [1930] 1961). That is, they are aimed at preserving life and, more particularly, communal life.

Freud's theorizing about religion as an illusion closely parallels Durkheim's work. That is, Freud, too, depicted religion as socially integrating society. However, whereas Durkheim focuses on solidarity, Freud emphasizes the potential for the instinctual tendency toward disintegration and aggression (i.e., the death instinct) (Freud [1930] 1961).

Freud's sociology is revealed when he contends that it is the suppression of this instinct that is needed to maintain civilization ([1928] 1961; [1930] 1961). The point of interest that we will return to throughout this argument is concerned with not only how civilization is maintained, but also how civilization is disintegrated. Therefore, it is from Freud's theorizing (which takes into account the power of the death instinct) that we may begin to formulate this argument. Freud defines illusion in the following way:

An illusion is not the same thing as an error; nor is it necessarily an error; Aristotle's belief that vermin are developed out of dung... was an error.... On the other hand, it was an illusion of Columbus that he had discovered a new sea-route to the Indies.... What is characteristic of illusions is that they are derived from human wishes. In this respect they come near to psychiatric delusions. But differ from them, too, apart from the complicated structure of delusions.... Illusions need not necessarily be false—that is to say, unrealizable or in contradiction to reality. For instance, a middle-class girl may have the illusion that a prince will come and marry her. This is possible; and a few such cases have occurred. That the Messiah will come and found a golden age is much less likely. Whether one classifies this belief as an illusion or as something analogous to a delusion will depend on one's personal attitude.... Thus we call a belief an illusion when a wish-fulfillment is a prominent factor in its motivation and in doing so we disregard its relations to reality ([1927]1961:39-40).

Reading this quotation, one may be tempted to become fixated upon the individual's disregard for reality in adherence to an illusion. Defining the illusion as such seems to depict it as a pathological state or as a manipulative myth that induces what Marxists refer to as false consciousness. To be fair, there are elements of truth to both of these

views. An illusion may become pathological in that its realization, in addition to being unattainable, becomes an obsession. Also, illusions may be said to manipulate some to the advantage of others. An example of this may be drawn from the religious doctrines that differentiate groups of people by assigning divine preferment to some and not to others, such as India's caste system.

However, let us not forget what Freud has illustrated in The Future of an Illusion. As it is often misunderstood, Freud did not delineate the illusion as a maladjusted part of society that needs to be transcended. To be sure, he does state, “[men] by withdrawing their expectations from the other [i.e., spiritual] world and concentrating all their liberated energies into their life on earth... will probably succeed in achieving a state of things in which life will become tolerable for everyone and civilization no longer oppressive to anyone” ([1927]1961:63). Having read this passage, we wonder if Freud is offering us a solution, i.e., a salvation from being subjugated to civilization. As such, we excitedly turn the pages to arrive at his ingenious plan. However, in the chapter that follows this quotation we come to learn that Freud had been playing devil's advocate, and now wishes to destabilize this expectation. He states,

that sounds splendid! A race of men who have renounced all illusions and have thus become capable of making their existence on earth tolerable! I, however, cannot share your expectations. And not because I am the obstinate reactionary you perhaps take me for. No, it is because I am sensible. (1927 [1961]:65).

Having played us the fool, Freud goes on to remind us that that the notion that the illusion may be transcended is itself an illusion resting upon a foundation of errors. It is an illusion because our “wish” to not be guided by something other than pure reason is at

a discord with reality. The error it rests upon is that it presupposes the possibility that human nature will change (i.e., that the needs met by the illusion will disappear).

What he does not imply, however, is that a particular illusion, such as religion, must inevitably be maintained and endured. Rather, he proposes that one illusion may be replaced by another. As such, religion may be replaced by something else, but that something else needs to “take over all the psychological characteristics of religion—the same sanctity, rigidity and intolerance, the same prohibition of thought—for its own defence” ([1927]1961:66). Freud is careful, however, not to recommend transcending religious doctrine as an illusion; rather, he suggests that religious doctrine is ideal for the task. He elaborates that the human requires the inculcation of a doctrinal system “that admits of no criticism” ([1927]1961:66). At this suggestion (i.e., to be ingrained with a doctrinal system that admits no criticism), the reader may recoil. Is not an inability to allow criticism a fascist disposition? Perhaps there is an element of truth to such an accusation; however, the present argument regards this postulate as a means for maintaining principles. That is, the ingrained doctrine that admits no criticism is regarded, here, as one that presents itself as a core value of the self.

Thus, the grand illusion reconciles the needs of the individual to those of the society. The individual, as aggressive and self-seeking by nature, needs to be channeled or coaxed by a grand illusion into repressing her nature in the service of civilization. This broad need is accomplished through the fulfillment of several more particular functions. As will be argued in the proceeding sections, in addition to fulfilling the societal need for moral regulation, overarching illusions work to fulfill the need for

meaning, and existential and emotional security. The satisfaction of these needs, in turn, provides for social integration. Subjugating her needs to those of society, the individual may be said to have acquired moral regulation over her nature. Without acknowledging this function and the needs it fulfills, morality is illustrated as a meaningless and irrelevant construct.

Theories concerning postmodernity have often ignored the relationship between the needs of the individual and of society. That is, those referred to as postmodernists often neglect to consider the relevance of Durkheim and Freud's theorizing about how the tension between the individual and society is reconciled through illusion. An undertaking of this consideration would improve our understanding of how the social world has changed overtime and how it will continue to change in the future.

### The Many Forms of Postmodernity

*To approach an understanding of the postmodernist age is to presuppose a questioning of, a loss of faith in, the project of modernity; a spirit of pluralism; a heightened skepticism of traditional orthodoxies; and finally a rejection of a view of the world as a universal totality, of the expectation of final solutions and complete answers. (Ahmed 1992)*

What Akbar S. Ahmed is suggesting in the above quote is that the postmodern age facilitates the dissolution of the legitimacy of grand "illusions." In addition to this claim, postmodernity constitutes a host of others conditions. Those who theorize about it often delineate different and, at times, contradicting ideas about what these conditions are and how they affect human behavior. Some portray the contemporary west as constituting an expanding system of control and manipulation by means of advanced

technical systems. Foucault (1977), for example, theorizes about the panopticon effect (i.e., the constant possibility of surveillance leads to self-regulation). Ritzer (2004) contends that pervasive McDonaldization, a form of bureaucracy characterized by control through standardization, has facilitated the destruction of autonomy and creativity.

Others highlight the growing instability of modern institutions and the subsequent breakdown in the collective moral code (e.g., Bauman's (2001) reflexive modernity). These theorists contend that the contemporary world constitutes a "lack" of totalizing control over the subject (e.g., Bauman 2001; Elliot 2004). Some argue that the discontinuities that have arisen are liberating. Bauman (1995; 2001) and Elliot (2004) argue that that the contemporary world ushers in the possibility of increased plurality and tolerance. Others regard the contemporary world as an empty shell devoid of any true purpose or meaning. Baudrillard (1986), for example, characterizes the contemporary world as a spectacle society in which the grandiose is epitomized for its own sake.

As can be surmised from the proceeding discussion, there is no continuity among these theorists as to their elective affinities for the present age. What these postmodern theorists have in common, however, is that they deconstruct reality and reveal its illusory nature without going much further. That is, for these theorists the illusion is either a manipulative vehicle, utilized for purposes of power and control, or it is merely a perverse illustration of a reality that cannot be objectively understood.



Although the aforementioned theorists have rightly problematized the contemporary world by highlighting increasing superficiality, manipulation, and decreasing moral standards, they fail to acknowledge the function that the illusion has for satisfying human needs. For the argument proposed here, I do not negate the increasingly superficial and manipulative nature of postmodern reality; rather, I contend that an evaluation of postmodern reality requires an understanding of how contemporary individual and societal needs are cultivated and satisfied. Thus, I propose to integrate a theory of human needs within the postmodern framework. In so doing, I intend to illustrate that the postmodernist literature's failure to discuss human ontology and the needs derived from that ontology leads them to be unable to adequately theorize about the dysfunctional (or functional) nature of postmodernity.

In discussing the function of illusion, I will be deriving most of my insights from, while simultaneously contending with, Zygmunt Bauman. I emphasize Bauman's model of postmodernity for the following reasons: 1) Bauman is highly influential within the postmodern literature; therefore, many scholars embed their theorizing within his depictions of reality. 2) Unlike other postmodern theorists who tend to portray humans as empty shells arbitrarily floating through space (e.g., Baudrillard), Bauman's theorizing emphasizes the emotional states of postmodern actors. As will be made apparent in the following discussion, emotions have a significant influence over human action. 3) Some of Bauman's works are arguably in favor of the relationship between postmodernity and sincere moral action. It is the intention of the argument here to

challenge this disposition and redirect how we may approach theorizing the potential for moral responsibility.

## CHAPTER II

### THE ELUSIVE ZYGMUNT BAUMAN

#### An Ambiguous Past

Zygmunt Bauman is a highly influential European sociologist (Bunting 2003) who theorizes about an array of social phenomena: modernity, postmodernity, liberation, moral responsibility, identity, totalitarianism, equality, justice, etc. (Bauman 2005; 2001; 1998). The discussion here is concerned with Bauman's theorizing about the relationship between moral responsibility and the contemporary epoch. Bauman delineates the contemporary world as volatile and replete with fear (Bauman 1998; 2001; 2005). Despite this negative illustration, however, he claims that the conditions that have facilitated this society may also contain the seeds of liberation for moral responsibility (Bauman 1998).

When questioned about this ambiguity, Bauman states,

the continuing uncontrollability of the already global network of mutual dependence and 'mutually assured vulnerability' most certainly does not increase the chance of... unity. This only means, however, that at no other time has the keen search for common humanity, and the practice that follows such an assumption, been as urgent and imperative as it is now. In the era of globalization, the cause and politics of shared humanity face the most fateful among the many fateful steps they have made in their long history. (Bauman and Yakimova 2002)

So in addition to acknowledging that people are unlikely to be united in the contemporary world, Bauman seems to be implying that society's shared humanity will evoke some form of positive action. This is not a complete answer, however. The reader is still searching in Bauman's work for how the gap between a shared humanity and

moral action is bridged. Further ambiguity is demonstrated in his indecision about what the contemporary societal conditions constitute. He moves from a discussion about postmodernity (Bauman 1998) to reflexive modernity (Bauman 2001) to liquid modernity (Bauman 2005).

In The Sociological Imagination (1959), C. Wright Mills argues that sociologists must focus on the connection between personal biography and history. In this way we may connect “public issues” to “private troubles.” With this concern in mind, we may address how Bauman’s biography is influenced by the historical events of his time. That is, we analyze how the public issues of Bauman’s time have shaped his private troubles and, subsequently, his ambiguous theorizing.

Bauman claims that it was from his wife’s memoirs of wartime Poland (in which she tells of how much of her extended family was killed) that influenced one of his most acknowledged works, Modernity and the Holocaust (1989). Bauman’s preoccupation with moral responsibility led him to ask, why, “under certain circumstances, decent people who are good husbands, neighbours and so on, participate in atrocities.... [that is] there are not so many psychologically corrupted people in the world to account for all the many atrocities around the world” (Bunting 2003). The answer to this query, Bauman contends, is the power of institutional conventions to distort human reasoning (Bauman 1995). These ideas were regarded with much controversy. Many scholars perceived the work to be absolving Germany from moral responsibility (Bunting 2003).

This criticism takes on a whole new meaning, however, when we delve deeper into Bauman’s past. That is, the ambiguity of his theorizing extends to the accounts that

Bauman gives of his life. Thus, it is from his past that we may begin to understand the ambiguity of his theory. Bauman was born in 1925 to a Jewish family in Posnan Poland (Bunting 2003; Edemariam 2007). When Germany invaded Poland, a teenaged Bauman and his family escaped to Soviet Russia, where he joined the Polish exile army. However, while living in Poland, Bauman joined the Communist party and the internal army: a military unit that constituted “the force charged with ‘suppressing terrorism inside the country - the equivalent of that now fashionable phrase, ‘the war against terrorism’” (Edemariam 2007).

Explaining why he decided to become a communist, Bauman states,

Poland was a very backward country before the war, which was exacerbated by the occupation. In an impoverished country you expect deprivation, humiliation, human indignity and so on, a whole complex of social and cultural problems to be dealt with. If you looked at the political spectrum in Poland at that time, the Communist party promised the best solution. Its political programme was the most fitting for the issues which Poland faced. And I was completely dedicated. Communist ideas were just a continuation of the Enlightenment. (Edemariam 2007).

As the above quotation illustrates, Bauman perceived Communism as a rational means to human progress. Although he later deviates from an orthodox Marxist framework, he still purports to hold to his Marxist roots. In an interview with the *Guardian* he states, “I never became anti-Marxist as most did. I learnt a lot from Karl Marx and I'm grateful” (Bunting 2003). Throughout this paper, the argument will be made that it his adherence to these ideas that Bauman is unable to reconcile the disparate parts of his work. That is, he cannot relinquish his rationalist stance toward an irrational world. As will become more apparent, Bauman’s theories seem open and wanting of further explanation because his personal history is unresolved.

Bauman's accounts of himself have been sparse and enigmatic. He has repeatedly declined to give an in-depth biographical account (Bunting 2003; Edemariam 2007). However, controversial information that was, until recently, unknown about his life was leaked in "an article in the rightwing Polish magazine *Ozon*, by historian Bogan Musial" (Edemariam 2007). Musial reveals that Bauman was a member of the Polish secret service, and he claims that Bauman "participated in the political cleansing of opponents of the regime" (Edemariam 2007).

In an interview about the subject, Bauman was asked, "did you do anything [while a member of the Secret Service] that might have had adverse consequences?" (Edemariam 2007). Bauman, remaining true to his enigmatic disposition, replies "'I don't believe there was any. At the same time, I was a part of a wider scene, and of course everything you do has consequences'" (Edemariam 2007). Bauman does, however, iterate that after leaving the Secret Service he was subjected to persecution from the organization for 15 years. In addition to being extensively spied on and ousted from the internal army, Bauman was also barred from the university and denied the opportunity to publish.

Considering these tidbits of Bauman's life, one is left wondering how much of his morally questionable past has instigated his emphasis upon the relationship between moral responsibility and historical context. That is, may Bauman be attempting to absolve himself from moral responsibility for his participation in the Secret Service? Bauman contends that he takes full responsibility for this involvement, but, not

surprisingly, he remains elusive as to what the responsibility entails. He simply acknowledges that all people make bad decisions that at one time seemed appropriate.

This line of logic parallels his theorizing about the Holocaust: where he claims that good people do bad things by adhering to a bureaucratic rule. However, he contends that he has kept his involvement with the Secret Service a secret, because of a signed obligation to do so. The irony in this is that despite calling for a new form of morality that is meant to transcend obligations to rationalistic rules, he seems to be unable to do just this (Edemariam 2007). One may ask, does he continue to adhere to his socialist roots and rationalist framework in an attempt to give reason (i.e., a sense of purpose) to his past and the persecution he endured for it? Or does he continue to adhere to these roots to give reason to his role in persecuting others?

In another interview, Bauman is reported as saying,

The book of Job poses the question that we are worrying about now. Job was so good, yet he was punished again and again. How could God do it? How could the link between virtue and reward on the one hand and sin and punishment on the other be broken? Think of July 7 bombs – people were killed at random. The terrorist bombs are like natural catastrophes, like Katrina and the tsunami, unpredictable and incomprehensible. (Jeffries 2005)

Does Bauman see himself as Job? Perhaps Bauman's own life seems incomprehensible and he is struggling to make sense of it. Or, perhaps Bauman, like Job, hopes that his devotion will one day be rewarded. The difference, however, is that Bauman's God is Reason and Progress. Despite how they have punished him so, he dares not relinquish them completely. They are the divine, and the divine is mysterious and terrifyingly unforgiving.

Perhaps this position is unfair. After all, in the same interview Bauman states,

What in the 18<sup>th</sup> century seems to be a great leap forward was not. What happened in those years was just a detour. We've just returned to the starting point after all this tremendous investment in science and technology. The difference now is that we no longer trust the future or believe in progress, we are without the illusions that sustained the modern project. (Jefferies 2005. Emphasis added)

In this passage Bauman seems to acknowledge that progress is an “illusion” of modernity. However, if we are careful, we see that he regards the “modern project” as the illusion that makes us lose “faith” in progress. That is, perhaps Bauman is still waiting for a “true” Reason to issue forth “real” progress. He does not yet know how it will reveal itself and, to be sure, he will not make the naïve mistake, like his Marxian predecessors, of arriving at a definitive answer to its nature.

He concludes the interview by stating, “‘my professor 50 years ago said: ‘Zygmunt. Don’t prophesy.’ So I wont start now’” (Jefferies 2005). The irony here is that he has been regarded as the “Prophet of postmodernity” (Bunting 2003). Given his theorizing about the chances for moral responsibility, it seems to be an appropriate title. However, given that he never adequately arrives at a definitive answer, Bauman seems to remain true to his professor and the liquid metaphor that comprises a great deal of his work.

One can agree with much of Bauman’s theorizing. However, it is upon his idea that liberation is possible within what may be referred to as the postmodern condition that one may challenge Bauman’s theorizing. That is, Bauman fails to address how the postmodern condition addresses human needs and how the relationship between these two variables (the postmodern condition and human needs) directly implicates the manifestation of moral action. As such, the following sections delineate a particular line



of logic: Bauman's theory of liquid modernity presents us with the conceptual backdrop of advanced western(ized) societies, and the implementation of a theory of human needs brings us further in our understanding of liquid modernity's implications for moral responsibility.

### Bauman's Liquid Modernity

Bauman initially referred to the contemporary era as postmodernity (2001; 2001a; Elliot 2004), but later, to avoid confusion from what had become an ambiguous term, referred to it as Liquid Modernity (2005). Although he theorizes about the contemporary epoch as distinct from Modernity, Bauman acknowledges that many elements of Modernity (a concept which will be discussed in a following section) continues to be pervasive in the present era (2005). The metaphorical use of "liquid" (i.e., liquid modernity, liquid life) highlights the free floating, ephemeral nature of this contemporary world. "Liquid modern' is a society in which the conditions under which its members act change faster than it takes the way of acting to consolidate into habits and routines" (Bauman 2005:1).

Such a condition requires constant and hyper-vigilant scanning of one's surroundings and a readiness to adapt. That is, the consequence of liquid modernity is liquid life (2005). Subject to a continuously changing environment the members of liquid society are in danger of being left behind. Bauman states,

in a liquid modern society, individual achievements cannot be solidified into lasting possessions because, in no time, assets turn into liabilities and abilities into disabilities. Conditions of action and strategies designed to respond to them age quickly and become obsolete before the actors have a chance to learn them

properly.... Extrapolating from past events to predict future trends becomes ever more risky and all too often misleading. Trustworthy calculations are increasingly difficult to make, while foolproof prognoses are all but unimaginable: most if not all variables in the equations are unknown, whereas no estimates of their future trends can be treated as fully and truly reliable (2005:1-2).

This precarious existence produces great angst for the members of liquid society. There is a constant concern to identify as well as seize the “right” course of action. This is highly apparent within the contemporary job market. The accelerated pace of technological development within a global context provides moments of opportunity that must be consumed and discarded before they reveal themselves to be sinking ships (Bauman 2005). What better example of this is there than the current chaos created by the subprime mortgage crisis in the United States. What had presented itself as opportunity for many (either owning a home or expanding the financial sector), later revealed itself to be an utter devastation (a dramatic influx in foreclosures and failing financial firms).

Elaborating on the idea of consuming opportunities, Bauman emphasizes the “desire to consume” as one of the significant forces perpetuating liquid modernity. Everything within the liquid life, whether material or ideal, is judged by its consumption value. As the fluctuating context depletes the consumption value of an object, it is either disposed (or becomes a liability). Thus, once fashionable slacks may become a social faux pas. Having the latest technological devices (i.e., cell phones, the Internet), in addition to having knowledge of how to work these devices, is more than fashionable; it is a social necessity.

Identities do not escape the consumption frenzy either. The most successful of those within liquid modernity assimilate the newest buzzwords that make up the newest topics of interest and the acceptable (i.e., fashionable) beliefs to espouse. Once the value of an identity is depleted, it is destined, like the outdated jeans (which are a part of contemporary identity), to be discarded. Otherwise, it becomes a social hazard in the sense that the person, as the embodiment of the particular identity, has less consumer value. Thus, the members of liquid life are, like everything else, objects of consumption. When they are no longer appealing to others, they too are discarded.

Therefore, Bauman (2005) contends that the fear of being relegated to waste is as much, if not more, of a driving force in liquid modernity as is the wish to consume. He states, “nudged from behind by the horror of expiry, life in a liquid modern society no longer needs to be pulled forward by imagined wonders at the far end of modernizing labours” (3). Thus, the possibilities for future society are not as motivating over human behavior as is the fear of being left behind or becoming irrelevant.

Juxtaposing this observation with Riesman’s ([1950] 2001) The Lonely Crowd, we may acknowledge that the inner directed, as part of Modern Society, were characterized as industrious creators. They strived to be masters of their environment, “captains of industry,” explorers, and in general, the first to conquer a frontier, physical or metaphorical. However, as Bauman brings to light, the member of liquid modernity is preoccupied with keeping-up. In Riesman’s terms, he or she becomes other-directed. Rather than pertaining to a master and shaper of the world, control for them has more to do with one’s ability to maneuver and adapt to the rapidly changing environment. The

fact that these changes are taking place within a global network makes them all the more threatening.

It should not come as a surprise then that Bauman highlights “self-reforming selves” (2005: 11) as a primary value within liquid life. Acquiring new selves is as important as discarding the old ones. In the liquid society, one’s success is dependent upon one’s “freedom - freedom to move, freedom to choose, freedom to stop being what one already is and freedom to become what one is not yet” (2005:5). As such, within liquid society some are freer than others. He elaborates,

The greatest chances of winning [i.e., being free] belong to the people who circulate close to the top of the global power pyramid, to whom space matters little and distance is not a bother; people at home in many places but in no one place in particular. They are as light, sprightly and volatile as the increasingly global and extraterritorial trade and finances that assisted at their birth and sustain their nomadic existence.... In varying degrees, they all master and practice the art of ‘liquid life’: acceptance of disorientation, immunity to vertigo and adaptation to a state of dizziness, tolerance for an absence of itinerary and direction, and for an indefinite duration of travel. (3-4)

The above passage is simultaneously insightful and deficient. The profound insight is the acknowledgement that liquid life necessitates mobility and changeability for survival and success. Thus, it is the wealthy who are best equipped for meeting the obstacles of liquid life.

However, it is off-putting that Bauman conceptualizes freedom within a materialist framework. We may acknowledge that these actors are more “successful,” but are they free (in any socially meaningful sense)? As stated previously, Bauman views these actors as free to move, to choose, and to change their identities; however, he goes on to delineate their movement, their choices and their changing identities as being

compelled by a fear of becoming obsolete. We may say that their movements, their choices, and their changing identities are made with more ease relative to others, but they too are subject to the pangs of ambiguity and uncertainty.

Also, it is clear that the more “successful” are not free to take moral responsibility. Rather, they are trapped within the fight for self-preservation that is liquid society. That is to say, they are trapped within a frenzy to consume, and compelled to consume “better” than others consume. In addition to being relevant (having the right skills, the right possessions, etc.), the members of liquid society try to secure their places (however briefly) by being better than others (having better credentials and better things). Riesman referred to this process as the “narcissism of small differences.”

### Is the Contemporary World Liberating or Just a New Problem?

Modernity reflects the full force of the Enlightenment project. It is the embodiment of Reason as the ultimate value, and puts forth progress as its ultimate rationality (Bauman 2001). Bauman demonstrates, however, that modernity does not necessarily promote progress; rather, he shows it to have facilitated the conditions for the most extreme of human atrocities: genocide (and in particular the Holocaust). The technical systems and technology that have comprised modernity have abstracted humans away from true moral reasoning (a reasoning concerned with people not procedures<sup>3</sup>). According to Bauman, this condition lives on in the contemporary epoch. That is, postmodernity has retained the rational technologies and subsequent

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<sup>3</sup> Horkheimer’s Eclipse of Pure Reason (1946) served as one of several inspirations for this idea by Bauman.

contradictions of modernity. That being said, there are features which distinguish the two, and it is by differentiating these epochs, Bauman concludes, that there is a chance for a better future.

As Lyotard ([1979] 1984) makes clear, modernity attains its legitimacy from a grand narrative. The Grand narrative, as such, is one of the features that distinguishes modernity from the postmodernity. That is, postmodernity is identified as the “incredulity towards metanarratives” (Lyotard [1979] 1984). Bauman contends that this incredulity has the potential to emancipate humans from institutional restraints. He elaborates that postmodernity may be depicted as a self-conscious modernity. The reflexive nature of this society assuages the human struggle against ambivalence. He states, “postmodernity... is modernity which goes beyond its false consciousness and comes to understand what it actually was doing all along, i.e., producing ambivalence and pluralism, and also reconciles itself to the fact that the purposes which were originally set, e.g. rational order and absolute truth, will never be reached” (2001:19-20). Because people come to understand that contingency and, therefore, uncertainty are everlasting features of reality (i.e., reflexive modernity illuminates the illusory nature of reality), the postmodern condition facilitates an environment in which ethical regulation is transformed.

Because the ethical practices of Modernity entail the regulation of moral responsibility by institutions and organizations (e.g., the state and church), Bauman contends that this lead to “adiaphorization:” the process by which the human, by performing his or her duty to the institutional or organizational procedures or rules, is

able to abstain from bearing moral responsibility for the “other.” That is, the individual practices what he refers to as operational morality: the process by which the individual feels that she has fulfilled her moral duty by following the “rules.”

To illustrate this point, we may turn to the three potential forms of togetherness which Bauman has argued are all possibilities within the postmodern epoch. *Being-aside* is what Bauman referred to as persons inhabiting space in close proximity to one another. This is a relatively superficial form of togetherness because other people are simply a backdrop to be navigated (i.e., they hardly grasp the attention of the self). *Being-aside*, however, may lend itself to *being-with*: a form of togetherness in which the others become objects of attention. However, *being-with* does not entail that the whole spectrum of the multifaceted self is brought into the encounter. That is, only those facets of self that hold contextual relevance are made known. Bauman elaborates, “*being-with* is a meeting of incomplete beings, [i.e.,] of deficient beings.... Highlighting is as crucial as concealing, engagement must be completed with disengagement, deployment of some resources must be paired with withdrawal of others” (1995:50). As such *being-with* constitutes the aforementioned procedural morality. The individual in these encounters is morally guided by the dictates of the conventional context. Bauman contends that the mature, “moral” self is manifested when *being-with* is transformed into *being-for*: a form of togetherness that is made possible by the postmodern condition. He states,

The authority of churches, political parties, academic institutions and so on is clearly declining. The responsibility which was taken away from the individuals is coming back – you and I are very much felt alone with our decisions. We do not have a moral code which has all the visibility of being absolute and universal. We confront moral problems again as if modernity had not happened: we are thrown back on individual responsibility. (2001:22)

Under these conditions (the weakening of institutions and the grand narratives they bolster) the individual may demonstrate moral responsibility for the other (as opposed to the rule or procedure). That is, being-for the other constitutes an encounter in which the dictates of the conventional context are transcended. Individuals come together and address one another as whole selves.

This is a tempting argument, but it is deficient in its logic. The moral responsibility of which Bauman champions is, ostensibly, a responsibility that is primordially ingrained in human nature and repressed by particular social contexts (i.e., contexts that are constituted by grand narratives). We are further convinced of this proposition when Bauman states, “as Ernest Bloch memorably put it, before being homo sapiens, a thinking creature, man is a hoping creature. It wouldn’t be too difficult to show that Emmanuel Levinas meant much the same when he insisted that ethics came before ontology” (2005: 191). This argument would be made sufficient if we were to accept ontological assumptions that depict humans as innately benevolent, but theories that suggest otherwise are more convincing (Freud [1930] 1961) (an argument which will be addressed in proceeding sections).

We may even assume that this responsibility is not primordial and claim that the breakdown of the moral code entails that moral responsibility is thrown back onto a socialized ‘I’ of which Mead (1934) theorized. However, even if we were to assume this, it is still hard to accept that the self would take on moral responsibility for the other. That is, even if Mead’s “I” may provide the self with values and desires conducive to Bauman’s “being-for” the other, we must remember that the breakdown of the moral



code in society constitutes the feigning influence of the agents (e.g., the family, schools, etc.) that inculcate the “I” with these values and desires.

Also, David Riesman ([1950] 2001) illustrates that the period of time in which individual’s inculcation of values and principles was at its strongest (i.e., the inner directed epoch) is giving way to an era of character development where values and principles are ephemeral and highly plastic. The latter is what he referred to as the other-directed epoch. With this form of character development the individual is more likely to receive motivation for her actions from the social cues she picks-up from peers and the media (Riesman posited a “human radar” metaphor to illustrate this character type). It is hard to imagine, an other-directed generation of individuals relying on an inculcated sense of moral principles. Bauman (2005), ironically, purports this same sentiment when he suggests that the primary motivators in liquid life are the wish to consume and the fear of being left behind. Thus, the member of liquid society is presented as lacking deeply ingrained values and utilizing the social radars of which Riesman theorizes.

Furthermore, Bauman’s argument that humans embrace ambivalence is completely contradictory to the psychological and social psychological literature on the subject. In presence of ambivalence, humans yearn for continuity and stability (Hogg 2000). When Bauman contends that postmodernity may embrace ambivalence in light of its inability to maintain environmental stability, he falls into the same predicament of the enlightenment theories (e.g., Marx’s historical contingency). By suggesting that

people will relinquish their strivings for a sense of continuity and coherence in their lives, he puts forward an overly rational model of human behavior.

### The Grand Illusion and Integration through Shared Meanings

Bauman's being-for the other may be improved upon if it establishes a foundation of values from which moral action may be derived. I find that Riesman's delineation of the other-directed, once again, helps to illustrate this argument. The inner-directed, inoculated with values from their parents and other moral agents (e.g., schools), were supplied with this foundation. As such, they had a "shared" understanding of, among other things, what was "just" and "right." Therefore, they had a shared moral means by which they could act upon the social world. Those in liquid modernity, however, must utilize a different means by which they can determine right from wrong. Bauman seems to acknowledge this disposition when he states that liquid modernity facilitates, "vigilance, not loyalty" (2005:9).

One may argue that loyalty is a moral act that is deeply rooted in core values of the self. The soldier is loyal to his unit and country; to betray them is to betray the values he reveres and strives to embody. As such, the following question arises: when loyalty is replaced by vigilance, what kind of moral action does this entail? I argue that it entails the opposite of "being-for" the other. The individual in this circumstance is focused on self perseverance (an instinctual drive).

To be fair, Bauman illuminates a real danger when he discusses the illusion (i.e., grand narrative) of modernity. That is, they may be utilized to manipulate the masses

into accepting and participating in the greatest of human atrocities, such as genocide. What Bauman fails to realize is that these illusions serve as tools of social integration through shared values, objects of reverence, conceptions of justice, etc. In short, some of these illusions provide shared systems of meaning. When the grand illusions breakdown, as we see happening in liquid modernity, people will not display a genuine, primordial morality; rather, they will utilize synthetic moral guidelines that they acquire through the culture industry. These synthetic moral guidelines, it may be argued, are what Stjepan Mestrovic (1997) refers to as Postemotional scripts.

For now it is enough to say that these scripts are not deeply ingrained; rather, they are ephemeral and highly malleable. Because they do not manifest as core features of the self (at least as an ossified part of the conscience), these scripts may be acquired and discarded with little, if any, emotional repercussions. Those who are more successful at adhering to the right scripts in the right places and at the right times demonstrate a knack for “vigilance” (i.e., they have a highly tuned social radar). Like everything else in liquid modernity, these scripts are judged by their consumption value, not their moral value.

Bauman illustrates this sentiment when he states, “even the new environmental concerns owe their popularity to the perception of a link between the predatory misuse of the planetary commons and threats to the smooth flow of the self-centered pursuits of liquid life” (2005:11). As such, the genuine emotion being expressed does not pertain to a concern for the sanctity of mother earth; rather, it pertains to *fear* (a fear characterized by *anxiousness* to be specific) and *desire* (i.e., the driving forces of liquid

modernity) on a number of levels. It pertains to the fear of being “out of touch with the times” or “the desire to be cool.” It pertains to the fear that one’s life may be severely impaired or distinguished. It pertains to the desire to consume more!

Bauman goes as far as to argue that this self-centered behavior reflects what he refers to as “an ideology of privatization” (2008:20). This ideology is “addressed to individuals, and fit only for individual use” (20). He elaborates that with the prevalence of such an ideology, attempts at solidarity are ineffectual and outright counterproductive. To better illustrate this point, he suggests that the contemporary reality-television show, *Big Brother*, embodies the ideology of privatization in full. *Big Brother*, he explains, is a game based on survival (individual survival to be specific). Loyalty in this game is a temporary condition, only to be discarded when it outlives its usefulness to individual participants. Thus, cut-throat competition is the ultimate objective. The means for achieving this objective are often conceit and manipulation (Bauman 2008). Such a world view, I argue, reflects a breakdown or regression of social cooperation and creation. In other words, such a state of conditions may be depicted as a societal regression. Loyalty to the collective is increasingly depleted in this atomistic society.

Such a regressive society is destructive on several levels. To begin with, when webs of cooperation breakdown, collective goods/achievements are depleted. That is, personal satisfactions are not sacrificed for the good of the community. An example of this, it may be argued, is the great length of time it has taken for the industrially advanced societies to start to seriously consider the implementation of environmental policies. Another destructive tendency is the depletion of systems of meaning that

comes with reduced social integration. For example, in the absence of communal values, it may be argued, the fulfillment of a higher need for a meaningful life is inhibited. That is, striving for more objects of consumption (both ideal and material), the individual is not provided with a “greater” purpose. As such, meaning construction becomes ostensibly shallow. This social regression, I will argue in the proceeding sections, is reflective of Freud’s ([1930]1961; [1927]1961) death instinct.

### Human Needs and Moral Responsibility

The picture painted, thus far, is one of a society comprised of egoistic individuals, lacking concrete moral regulation, and overly driven by fear (a primary emotion (Ekman 1969)) and desire (a primary instinctual-drive (Freud [1930] 1961; 1961[1927])). But suggesting that there has been a character change by juxtaposing Riesman’s inner- and other-directed only gives us part of picture behind liquid modernity. To achieve the rest of the picture, we must address the aforementioned deficiencies within Bauman’s theory. That is, we need to address the needs rooted in human nature before we can continue to theorize about the lack of, and potential for, moral responsibility within the contemporary world.

Abraham Maslow’s (1943; 1962) theorizing brings us closer in this direction by highlighting the dependency of human motivation upon the satisfaction of particular human needs. Maslow hierarchically organizes categories of human needs according to prepotency (with the physiological needs having the most prepotency and self-actualization or the higher needs having the least prepotency). Once a particular need or

group of needs is satisfied, the next group of needs within the hierarchy will come to dominate consciousness. As such, “gratified needs are not active motivators” (Maslow 1943: 395). This does not preclude the possibility that multiple stages of needs may be felt simultaneously; rather, it suggests that to the degree that more basic needs are not being met, they will have greater influence over consciousness.

The most basic of needs in this hierarchy are the physiological needs (i.e., air, water, food, shelter, sleep, sex). The implication of not fulfilling these needs is apparent, because they are so vital to human existence (even sex in that it is required for the continuation of the species). The next level of basic needs is the need for safety and security. In illustrating the significance of these needs, “child psychologists and teachers have found that children need a predictable world; a child prefers consistency, fairness and a certain amount of routine. When these elements are absent he becomes anxious and insecure” (Goble 1970: 38-39). Note that these feelings, anxiety and insecurity, are key features of liquid modernity. Thus, we may acknowledge that living a liquid life (Bauman 2005) does not necessitate that these basic needs do not need to be addressed.

Goble elaborates, “the healthy [adult]... also seeks order and stability, but it is not the life or death necessity that it is for the neurotic” (39). Having previously made the parallel between the members of liquid life (Bauman 2005) and the other-directed (Riesman [1950] 2001), we may say that these individuals (living in liquid society) exhibit signs of neurosis through their obsession with being a member of the crowd and

the great anxiety they experience in regards to “keeping up appearances”<sup>4</sup>. We may further suggest the possibility of neurosis on a grand scale.

As such, safety and security needs imply, in addition to a need for physical safety, a need for emotional and existential safety. That is, people need a secure social environment for keeping their feelings intact and maintaining a stable sense of self. The lack of these conditions inhibits the prepotency and satisfaction of the higher needs. As will be argued, the higher needs are social in nature and serve to integrate society. For now, however, it is important to note that Maslow theorized several stages of higher needs (e.g., love and belongingness, meaningfulness, truth, beauty, etc.). Achieving the satisfaction of these stages brought one closer to what he referred to as self-actualization.

The argument presented here, however, finds Maslow’s theory of self-actualization somewhat problematic. To begin with, Maslow theorized that only a select few had the potential of becoming self-actualized (Goble 1970). Even if this postulate were valid, it is not helpful for the argument presented here. That is, this argument is concerned with a general trend in society (not the facilitation of maximum potential for an elite few). Also many of the layers of higher needs, as theorized by Maslow, are beyond the scope of this discussion. That is, this argument is primarily concerned with the generation of meaning and social integration. Therefore, this argument solely addresses meaning construction as a higher need. The rationale for this is that many of the other higher needs (e.g., art, beauty, justice) may be interpreted as the higher need for meaning. As such, it is not paramount to the discussion here that each of these

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<sup>4</sup> This parallels Riesman’s (1950) theorizing about the anxiety experienced by the other-direction society.

categories be addressed. Doing so would require a digression away from the main line of logic.

That being said, Maslow's theory is useful here because understanding how the postmodern condition (what Bauman refers to as liquid modernity) facilitates or inhibits the satisfaction of human needs will inform if and how moral responsibility is possible. To make this argument, however, we must first establish what we mean by moral responsibility. To answer this question, we may utilize Bauman's theorizing once again. The moral responsibility that this argument is concerned with is one in which conventional morality is transcended and is directed toward the "other" (rather than directed toward self-preservation).

Such a morality requires a certain level of social integration. In other words, responsibility for the other is achieved as an inculcated value. For this to happen, however, there are certain individual and societal needs that must be met. In this case, the individual need and the societal need are intertwined in that the satisfaction of one facilitates the satisfaction of the other. In particular I am referring to the higher need for a meaningful life (i.e., a life of purpose beyond atomistic interest). This higher need is in the service of social integration. It entails a shared sense of meaning through shared values. For this need to be satisfied, however, entails a twofold process: 1) the satisfaction of the lower needs (e.g., nourishment, shelter, safety) and 2) the facilitation of higher needs (as a social product).

However, as Bauman has illuminated, those living a liquid life are characterized by a perpetual anxiety of being left out or behind. To illustrate this point, we may evoke



the “keeping up with the Joneses” metaphor again. The member of liquid life needs the right car, the right job, the right family, the right IDENTITY. However, what is “right” is in a perpetual state of flux within the liquid world. Consumption must continue indefinitely. We have already noted that this precarious state of affairs leads to great anxiety. What is important is to acknowledge that this anxiety indicates that a need for emotional and existential safety (particularly in reference to a continual need to change one’s identity) is not satisfied. As such, those living in the liquid world have demonstrated “vigilance, not loyalty” (Bauman 2005:9).

They demonstrate vigilance in that they keep up with the latest trends in fashion, opinion, technical skills, etc. They continually go back to educational programs to receive further training to acquire “new” skills and knowledge. They go to the plastic surgeon to diminish the unacceptable appearance of aging. They pay lip service to current events, and maintain a well nourished understanding of popular culture. They fail to demonstrate loyalty in that they are continually changing and remain on the run. That is, their divorce rates are continually increasing. They take-on and slip-off principals as if rummaging through a wardrobe. In short, their efforts are toward self-preservation through consumption, not social meaning through solidarity.

Bauman also highlights that liquid life is driven by a desire to consume. This observation is a key point for this argument. It suggests that society facilitates the satisfaction of what Marcuse (1966) referred to as false needs. That is,

we may distinguish both true and false needs. ‘False’ are those which are superimposed upon the individual by particular social interests in his repression: the needs which perpetuate toil, aggressiveness, misery, and injustice. Their satisfaction might be most gratifying to the individual, but this happiness is not a

condition which has to be maintained and protected if it serves to arrest the development of the ability (his own and others) to recognize the disease of the whole and grasp the chances of curing the disease. The result then is euphoria in unhappiness. Most of the prevailing needs to relax, to have fun, to behave and consume in accordance with advertisements, to love and hate what others love and hate, belong to this category of false needs (4-5).

Considering the above passage, we may conclude that that Marcuse's depiction of false needs is in line with Bauman's theorizing. That is, in her effort to not be left behind, the person living within liquid life continually acquires her consumption taste from the culture industry.

False needs come to replace higher needs (i.e., they are synthetic higher needs). They provide a form of meaning for one's life, largely through status. As such the liquid society member consumes to remain a desirable commodity. False needs also serve to integrate, but in a narcissistic manner: if you have the right style, a good job, a well groomed family, then you are one of the lonely crowd. Better yet, if you have the latest style, the best job, and the perfect family then you may be the best in the lonely crowd. You become the one to be envied (as opposed to admired). But this meaning is hardly nourishing to the social-being. Its lack of nourishment stems from its fleeting, sparse nature. That is, because false needs are always changing they facilitate and promote competition in addition to anxiety. To be the best in the crowd is to be the first to consume the most "desired" objects. However, in the long run such competition and conformity do not promote social integration in the sense defined by Durkheim ([1897] 1951), namely, mutual sympathy and social cohesion.

What the aforementioned discussion of needs demonstrates is modern society's 1) *inhibition of the basic need for emotional and existential safety* and the 2) *facilitation*

*of unquenchable desire*<sup>5</sup>. Both conditions are facilitated by the promulgation of false needs by the culture industry. The consequences of these conditions are the breakdown of social integration and, subsequently, the inhibition of the higher need for meaning. We are, thus, one step closer to completing the picture. In the proceeding sections I will bring this argument to its completion by illustrating Freud's relevance by establishing a relationship between human ontology and the maintenance of civilization

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<sup>5</sup> That is, the facilitation of a state of anomie (Mestrovic [1988] 1993).

### CHAPTER III

#### FREUD'S DEATH INSTINCT AT THE SOCIETAL AND INDIVIDUAL LEVEL

##### Thanatos for the Individual: Inhibiting the Higher Need for Meaning

I argue, here, that the postmodern condition thwarts the fulfillment of the higher need for meaning. The obstruction of meaning construction in the contemporary world is not a new idea. Baudrillard (1986; [1985]1996) illustrates how this may occur with some of his most well known concepts: simulacra, implosion of symbols and ideas, and hyperreality. Simulacra refers to the increasing trend whereby objects become representations of representations. As such, the representation replaces the real and, therefore, becomes reality. He referred to this situation as hyperreality: a state of reality in which the distinction between what is real and what is fantasy is no longer apparent. . Implosion of symbols and ideas refers to the process by which a sign takes on so many meanings that it becomes meaningless. Implosion attacks meaning construction directly by inhibiting the ability of individuals to construct an ossified understanding of an object, whether material or ideal.

It is not difficult to make the connection between these concepts and liquid modernity. That is, the dramatic change that accompanies a fleeting and ephemeral world is unlikely to facilitate ossified depictions and understandings of reality. In this way, Baudrillard (1986) argues that the distinction between high and low culture and past and present is blurred. The value of things becomes homogenized (e.g., popular culture is just as relevant as any other form of culture).

This obstruction of meaning construction is implicit in Bauman's (2005) theorizing about identity. As has been discussed previously, liquid society inhibits one's ability to form and maintain a lasting identity. This obstruction pertains to one's ability to attain a meaningful sense of self. Lacking continuity, the self is fragmented (Bauman 1998) and, therefore, unable to generate a sense of purpose (i.e., deeper meaning) for the individual. Evidence of this is abundant in popular media. The member of liquid society is not hard-pressed to find a talk show, a magazine article, or a self-help book that purports to have the solution to "changing your life" in an effort to "make your life worth living." What these forms of media demonstrate is the blurring of boundaries between what is worth living for (i.e., having a sense of purpose) and being cool or having fun. Thus, the magazine headline reads, "Find What You've Been Looking For with a New Makeover." Ironically, the member of liquid society is looking for just that: someone or something to inform her of what it is she is supposed to be looking for (i.e., who she is supposed to be).

As such, we are given further insight into how the breakdown of society's illusions (which arguably is responsible for the aforementioned obstructions to meaning construction) thwarts the collective efforts at generating a representation of a "meaningful" and "moral" life. The purpose of this argument, however, is not to extensively elaborate on these ideas (i.e., how meaning construction is hindered); rather, the argument here purports to address a significant consequence of this postmodern condition. That is, how are we to reflect upon an atomistic society that is emotionally and existentially malnourished? If our theoretical interests are to depict the nature and

administration of this nourishment, we may look to Durkheim's theorizing and Parsonian structural-functionalism. These theories depict society as a self-sustaining, self-correcting system. However, we turn to Freud to explain the destructive aspects of society in the postmodern age. Thus, the argument given here contends that the obstruction of meaning construction facilitates the increasing prevalence of Thanatos, Freud's death instinct.

According to Freud ([1928] 1961; [1930] 1961), humans seek happiness, but energy needs to be diverted from satisfying our libinal drives (i.e., these drives must be repressed) and toward the cultivation and maintenance of civilization. The reason for this is that the individual's instinctual drives are at odds with the needs of society. Freud delineated this tension as the struggle between Eros and Thanatos (i.e., the struggle between our life instincts and our death instincts). Freud depicted Eros as representing "the instincts... [that] preserve living substance and... join it into ever larger units" (Freud [1930]1961:77). He elaborates, "civilization is a process in the service of Eros, whose purpose is to combine single human individuals, and after that families, then races, peoples and nations into one great unity, the unity of mankind" (81).

In addition to expanding webs of cooperation, Eros entails instinctual sublimation to thwart our innate proclivities toward aggression. In this way, libinal energy is not simply expended; rather, it is put toward productive use (i.e., toward creating as opposed to consuming). Thanatos, however, undermines a society's efforts at repressing these drives. Freud highlights that Thanatos is "seeking to dissolve those units [facilitated by the life instincts] and to bring them back to their primaeval,

inorganic state” ([1930]1961:77). Thanatos, then, is a regressive drive that gives rise to aggressive tendencies. Freud elaborates,

It is as though the life of the organism moved with vacillating rhythm. One group of instincts [i.e., the death instincts] rushes forward so as to reach the final aim of life as swiftly as possible [i.e., death]; but when a particular stage in the advance has been reached, the other group [i.e., life instincts] jerks back to a certain point to make a fresh start and so prolong the journey. ([1921] 1961:49).

As the above quotation suggests, Eros is manifested as an inhibition to the smooth flow of human energy, while Thanatos, when left to its own accord, does not necessitate this obstruction. Because Thanatos, unlike Eros, does not necessitate the thwarting of human desires, the pleasure principle (which is a driving force of human behavior) works in its service (Freud [1921] 1961). The repression undertaken in the service of Eros means that people cannot act on their basic urges. Freud argued that this condition leaves people frustrated and discontent.

The argument proposed here, however, contends that society may provide a means for mitigating their discontents. One method by which this may be accomplished is through the facilitation of meaning construction (and, therefore, to attach meaning to human suffering). Thus, this argument adheres to Victor Frankl’s (1997) assertion that a great deal of suffering may be endured if it entails a sense of purpose (i.e., if it is given meaning). However, this argument rejects Frankl’s assertion that Freud’s pleasure principle is a perverse form of the “true” driving force of human behavior: the will to meaning.

Frankl elaborates,

Sigmund Freud once asserted, ‘Let one attempt to expose a number of the most diverse people uniformly to hunger. With the increase of the imperative urge of

hunger all individual differences will blur, and in their stead will appear the uniform expression of the one unstillled urge.' Thank heaven Sigmund Freud was spared knowing the concentration camps from the inside. His subjects lay on a couch designed in the plush style of Victorian culture, not in the filth of Auschwitz. *There*, the 'individual differences' did not 'blur' but, on the contrary, people became more different; people unmasked themselves, both as swine and saints. (1997:153-154).

The above quotation challenges Freud's assumption that the human disposition can be reduced to the postulates of the pleasure principle: "the course of... [human] events is invariably set in motion by an unpleasurable tension, and... it takes a direction such that its final outcome coincide with a lowering that tension—that is, with an avoidance of unpleasure or the production of pleasure" (Freud [1921] 1961:3). Frankl challenges this postulate by illustrating his experience in Auschwitz. He explains that the concentration camps revealed a complex scenario in which some betrayed their fellow brethren in return for better treatment from their Nazi captors, while others, despite the logic of the pleasure principle, demonstrated courageous acts for the betterment of others. For example, Frankl tells of courageous captives who would sneak into other wards to bring others food or information, despite the danger of doing so (i.e., being beaten, tortured, or murdered). Thus, we are presented with an intriguing question: how is it that some of these captives seem to adhere to the postulates of the pleasure principle, but not others? That is, Frankl brings to light that there were those people who were not desperately self-seeking (in accordance with the pleasure principle); rather, they demonstrated behavior in accordance with a will to meaning (i.e., their altruism suggested that their was something driving their behavior beyond the avoidance of pain or the acquisition of pleasure).



However, Frankl's argument, try as it may, does not necessarily negate the logic of the pleasure principle. We may attempt an answer at the above question by delving further in Freud's theorizing. Freud highlights that the pleasure principle works in the service of Thanatos. As such, those who are dominated by the pleasure principle may be said to be dominated by the death instincts. Taking the next logical step, we may also contend that Frankl's observation of the will to meaning in those courageous persons may also be depicted as the Eros (i.e., the life instincts) prevailing over Thanatos. In their adherence to the will to meaning, those courageous persons whom Frankl discusses are preserving life and webs of cooperation. Furthermore, the values manifested through the will to meaning, it may be argued, are developed through socialization. In accordance with Freud's theorizing about the function of illusion, the will to meaning may reflect an ingrained doctrine. The consequences of this are that the individual is provided with another inner authority to satisfy. That is, as a social product it may transcend the immediate desires of the individual. In doing so, the will to meaning is molded in the service of the collective good.

Furthermore, the argument proposed here contends, in adherence to Maslow's hierarchy, that the will to meaning is a higher need. Frankl's illustration, however, may seem, contradictory to Maslow's hierarchy. That is, if lower needs are not being met, then how are we to believe that these courageous people felt the prepotency of the higher need for meaning? Would not the fact that they are starving and in danger of being tortured or murdered inhibit them from altruism? To answer this, the argument here

purports that although needs are hierarchically organized by human nature, this primordial hierarchy is not free from societal manipulation.

To elaborate on this point, these courageous individuals were not born and raised in the concentration camps; rather, it could be argued, that they have been inoculated with values that have equipped them with the means to satisfy their higher need for meaning. That is, their courageous demeanor has been facilitated by the social environments in which they were raised. If they had been raised in the concentration camps, their demeanors would likely be different. Furthermore, Maslow contends that the prepotency of differing levels of needs can and will be felt simultaneously. This does not negate the influence of the hierarchal structure of needs; rather, it suggests that some needs may and do come to have stronger prepotency over the conscience than others.

The question of primary import, then, is as follows: does postmodern society provide people with the means to attain and satisfy the higher need for meaning? The answer that has been given thus far is that with the increasing prevalence of false needs and the breakdown of a grand illusion (in which shared values may be derived), the attainment and satisfaction of the higher need for meaning is inhibited. To reiterate a theme presented throughout this argument, liquid modernity is propelled by the desire to consume and the fear of being left behind (Bauman 2005). As such liquid modernity leads to the breakdown of webs of cooperation. That is, there is a social regression; or, stated differently, there is a growing prepotency of the death instinct. Driven by desire and fear, the death instinct, as has been highlighted, works in the service of the pleasure

principle. As a consequence, the will to meaning (the need for a meaningful life) is not “sincerely” manifested as an option for the member of liquid society.

There is still a begging question, however, what—considering that the death instinct is growing more prevalent in the contemporary world—has happened to the power of the life instincts? Why has Eros not prevailed? An attempt at a full and satisfying answer to this question is beyond the scope of this argument. However, in the following section we may address an argument given by Herbert Marcuse that provides some insight toward an answer. Also, in doing so we will further illustrate the effects of Thanatos.

#### Thanatos for Society: Desublimation and the Growing Prevalence of Postemotionalism

I have argued that what has been theorized as the breakdown of grand illusions (i.e., what has been referred to as postmodernity (Bauman 1998; Lyotard [1979] 1984)), is a reflection of the growing domination of Freud’s ([1921] 1961; [1930] 1961) death instinct. That is, postmodern society constitutes the prevailing trend toward social regression. This regression is manifesting in several different ways in society. In the proceeding section I have already addressed how the prevailing death instinct implicates the individual: there is a growing prevalence of anomic, egoistic individuals who lack a moral ethos that Bauman refers to as being-for the other. Furthermore, these individuals are inhibited, largely through their satisfaction of false needs and social disintegration, from satisfying a higher need for meaning.

However, Thanatos manifests itself at the societal level as well. In the following section I will give some insight into how this social regression at the societal level occurs and what this regression entails. Marcuse may be utilized here to begin to understand how Thanatos has come to prevail over Eros. He (1966) argues that the prevailing false needs in the contemporary world are created by the increasing control over human consumption through the mass media, advertising, industrialization and prevailing ideological frameworks. Marcuse highlights that a main implication of these needs is a process he refers to as desublimation: the technologically controlled means by which people are able to relinquish efforts at deferred gratification. He states,

In this society, not all the time spent on and with mechanisms is labor time ...and not all the energy saved by the machine is labor power. Mechanization has also 'saved' the libido... that is, has barred it from previous modes of realization.... There was [in the pretechnical stage of society] a 'landscape,' a medium of libidinal experience which no longer exists. With its disappearance (itself a historical prerequisite of progress), a whole dimension of human activity and passivity has been de-eroticized. The environment from which the individual could obtain pleasure—which he could cathect as gratifying almost as an extended zone of the body—has been reduced. Consequently the 'universe' of cathexis is likewise reduced. The effect is the localization and contraction of libido (1966:72-73).

What Marcuse is suggesting in the above passage is that the technological transformation of society's material base constrains the manifestation and expression of instinctual drives. Although libidinal energy is saved in the mechanized world, the ways in which this energy is consumed is limited (e.g., craftsmen of pretechnical society are the assembly line workers of technically advanced society). He elaborates that the effect of this is a reduction in the incongruity between what Freud theorized as the reality principle (i.e., the way things are despite our wishes) and the pleasure principle.

Considering the various technologies that provide instant gratification in the present day, Marcuse's theorizing still holds significant relevance. With electronic communications, such as email, cell phones, fax machines, teleconferencing, we can transcend time and space to communicate with others and receive access to a variety of services. For example, there are few things that cannot be accomplished from the privacy of one's home computer. With access to the internet, one can purchase and receive just about anything: clothes, food, entertainment, etc.

Furthermore, the Internet provides the opportunity to easily and conveniently live another (possibly secret) fantasy life. This does not simply have to happen through the use of secret chat room aliases; rather, one may join a virtual world in which one can design a virtual self (including virtual body and accessories) and acquire virtual superhuman powers (e.g., second life, world of war craft, etc). In addition to online and mass media sex simulations, one may receive instant stimulation from "ready-to-order" fast food outlets and an array of prescription and over the counter drugs for every ailment from sadness to erectile dysfunction.

The contemporary world is inundated with these prepackage stimulants. As such, instant gratification is increasingly becoming taken-for-granted. Their constant use and presence gives them the allure of a necessity. This sentiment is reflected throughout society when people iterate, "I can't live without my cell phone" or "I need to have the newer edition;" hence, Marcuse's conceptualization of "false needs." In light of the suggestion that needs are false, one may question if gratification itself has become inauthentic?

It seems logical to argue that parallel processes with this (i.e., false needs and desublimation) are McDonaldization (Ritzer 2004) and Disneyfication (King 1978). Thus, while we satisfy our needs with on-demand services and a pervasive, synthetic appearance of happiness and “coolness,” the individual in what Bauman referred to as liquid modern society is left with a superficial sense of meaning fulfillment at best. Although desublimation, and the false needs that facilitate it, are a synthetic version of higher needs, they fail to adequately fulfill the function of higher needs (i.e., to facilitate the striving and possible accomplishment of a meaningful life).

Marcuse elaborates, “the conflicts of the unhappy individual now seem far more amenable to cure than those which made for Freud’s ‘discontent in civilization,’ and they seem more adequately defined in terms of the ‘neurotic personality of our time’ than in terms of the eternal struggle between Eros and Thanatos” (1966:77). What Marcuse does not make explicit, but, if we are to take the next logical step, implies in the above quotation is that the reduction of the tension experienced between Eros and Thanatos entails the prevalence of one instinct over the other. Clearly, Eros is not the prevailing force. Furthermore, Marcuse’s delineation that contemporary society facilitates the growing prevalence of the “neurotic personality” fits well with Bauman’s theorizing about liquid modernity.

That is, Bauman, too, depicts the contemporary world as facilitating a neurotic actor. Bauman’s actor obsesses over identity displays and maintaining an “up-to-date” persona (2005). Another parallel between these authors is how they theorize about the prevailing disposition toward consumption. That is, both Marcuse and Bauman

emphasize the insatiable consumption habits of the actor in contemporary society. This insatiable desire stems from, while it drives, an obsession to consume, be they material or ideal, the “right” objects (i.e., what’s cool, relevant, fashionable, contextually useful, etc.). In a rapidly changing world, what is “right” is highly ephemeral and volatile. Thus, perpetual consumption is necessary. Those that refuse to continue to consume will be, as Bauman explains, relegated to waste (2005).

Considering the extreme emphasis placed on consumption by the members of society, one may be tempted to argue that consumption has the power to integrate society. Therefore, any society that is called a consumer society, by definition, cannot be regarded as a society dominated by Thanatos. At first blush, this statement seems not entirely false. That is, some may argue that Durkheim ([1912]1995) illustrates this when he theorizes about the transition from mechanical to organic solidarity (they would be wrong, however). That is, as society modernizes the social glue becomes less constituted by shared values and beliefs and more constituted by “interdependence” through economic specialization.

The point of clarification then becomes what is the nature by which society is held together. Freud states, “[the] collections of men are to be libidinally bound to one another. Necessity alone, the advantages of work in common, will not hold them together” ([1930]1961:82). Thus, if economic interdependence is said to facilitate Eros at all, then it facilitates a synthetic one. That is, webs of cooperation are not facilitated through emotional attachment; rather, they constitute a relationship that is more instrumental in nature (i.e., striving to accomplish egoistic ends).

The ideal of civilization or the collective, *sui generis*, is not what is being accomplished through this form of cohesion (Durkheim [1912]1995); rather, society is increasingly becoming more of a reflection of atomistic individuals and groups interconnected by the remnants of a decaying structure (which we have called modernity). Thus, we may not argue that integration through consumerism negates the idea that Thanatos has increasingly come to dominate the contemporary world. What may be suggested, but which is a digression beyond the scope of this argument, is that Thanatos has not yet succeeded (i.e., has not reached its goal of ultimate death).

Thus, may we argue that there is nothing that connects us beyond economic utility? Riesman ([1950] 2001) and Mestrovic's (1997) theorizing suggests that we cannot. Mestrovic, elaborating on Riesman's theorizing about other directed society, suggests that society is pseudo integrated by means of what he refers to as postemotionalism. Postemotionalism inhibits people from genuine feeling and action. In a postemotional society "*the authentic (community) is mass-produced artificially*" (Mestrovic 1997:74), and therefore inhibits the individual's embedment within a meaningful social milieu. That is, postemotionalism refers to "a new phase of development [in western societies] in which synthetic, quasi-emotions become the basis for widespread manipulation by self, others, and the culture industry as a whole" (iv).

The best way to delineate the synthetic solidarity that is facilitated by postemotionalism is Riesman's ([1950] 2001) other-directed character type. We do not share deeply ingrained values and principles; rather, we look for social cues to inform us of what we are suppose to value and what principles we are suppose to uphold (i.e.,



what's cool or fashionable). "What can be internalized, then, is not a code of behavior but the elaborate equipment needed to attend to such messages and occasionally to participate in their circulation" (Riesman [1950] 2001: 25). As such, one may question if an other-directed society can generate genuine collective sentiment. Extending Riesman's thesis of the widespread prevalence of "fake sincerity" Mestrovic states,

reading between the lines of... *The Lonely Crowd*, one gains the impression that an emotional shift is occurring in the transition from tradition through inner- to other-direction. It is a shift from a small set of basic emotions that are held passionately and rigidly in a group context, even if holding them meant offending others, to a vast array of superficial emotions that are as easy to slip on as off, depending on circumstances, and that are managed, even staged (1997:49).

That is, with the debilitation of genuine emotion, can the other-directed epoch be expected of being capable to undertaking sincere, emotional commitment to one another or society as a whole? Riesman identified each of the three character types as being associated primarily with one of three different emotional sanctions. The tradition-directed epoch was associated with shame, while the inner-directed was associated with guilt. The reader should note that these emotions seem to be a natural fit with the violation of what Freud regarded as the super ego ([1930]1961).

The other-directed, however, is associated with anxiety. Identifying the conditions under which the other-directed feels anxious (i.e., "making a good impression," "being in the know") we may come to see the nature of her connection to society and, subsequently, her moral reasoning. For the other-directed, individual and collective guilt and remorse are debilitated. That is, these anxious sentiments do not seem to reflect the "being-for the other" disposition that Bauman (1995) theorized about.

Rather, they are integrated through a commitment to synthetic, collective sentiments (i.e., they are connected through their “fake sincerity”).

Thus, postemotionalism is a reflection of Thanatos. The members of contemporary society do not come to identify and empathize with, or feel responsible for, one another or the society as a whole through their adherence to the postemotional script; rather, they attempt to mitigate their individual angst about being left behind or becoming obsolete. That is, the death instinct has increasingly come to dominate their will. The collective sentiment that had been developed and maintained in traditional society has broken down and, considering the present conditions, will continue to do so until its extinction. The depletion of an emotionally sincere social integration has important consequences for the moral disposition of a society. The primary consequence that this argument is concerned with is the increasing organization of moral action through postemotional scripts.

Having no grand narrative in which to embed itself, the postemotional script is readily available for manipulation. In a rapidly changing world filled with signs with no referents and imploded symbols, the individual is scared and confused. She seeks refuge from her nagging need for existential and emotional security in her adherence to what appears, at the “present” moment, to be legitimized ideas, beliefs, values, tastes, and any other dispositions that temporarily characterize her as an “individual” (i.e., a socially acceptable individual).

Ironically, the moral action that is constitutive of the postemotional society reflects Bauman’s theorizing about conventional morality (i.e., the rule driven morality

from which humans are liberated within liquid modernity) (1995). Moral responsibility, as such, is not demonstrated through a genuine emotional push to take a particular action; rather, it is manifested through a prepackaged, emotional script. Under these conditions, the ability to manipulate on a mass scale is unprecedented.

What better illustration of this than the events that followed the September 11 terrorist attacks on the world trade center. The conventional context evoked after this tragic day was one of patriotism and nationalism. The present argument does not purport that the feelings of sorrow for those lives lost during the attacks was not genuine; however, it does contend that the supposedly “moral” action taken as result of this event was insincere in its claims. The Bush administration, with overwhelming support from the American public, exploited the fear generated from 9/11 to reduce American Freedoms in the name of the preservation of “Freedom” (the insincere postemotional script). Adherence to this agenda was not motivated by a collective sentiment; rather, it was regarded as “the American thing to do” (i.e., it was spotted on the social radar as the acceptable attitude to hold).

Discussing a potential progressive aspect of the death instinct, Freud states,

a portion of the instinct is diverted towards the external world and comes to light as an instinct of aggressiveness and destructiveness. In this way the instinct itself could be pressed into the service of Eros, in that the organism was destroying some other thing, whether animate or inanimate, instead of destroying its own self. ([1930]1961:78).

As such, one may argue that the naming of an enemy and, subsequently, the channeling of aggression, triggers a collective sentiment that unites. There may even be a temptation to delineate the present circumstances in the United States as such. To be

sure, much of the Muslim world has been targeted as an enemy of the U.S., but so has the Bush administration, the political system, Wall Street, conservative media propagandists, Godless liberals, an apathetic American public, conglomerate corporations, France, etc.

It is not the intention of this argument to verify or negate the validity of these labels. The point to be derived from this is that in the absence of grand illusions, postemotional scripts run rampant. That is, the utopian vision of a plurality of perspectives feeding into a single discourse has not been reached; rather, an array of identity games has sprung up instead. Freud elaborates, “even where [the death instinct]... emerges without any sexual purpose, in the blindest fury of destructiveness, we cannot fail to recognize that the satisfaction of the instinct is accompanied by an extraordinarily high degree of narcissistic enjoyment” ([1930]1961:81). Thus, any plurality that exists is not necessarily the utopian one of which Bauman and his disciples (e.g., Elliot 2004) depict; rather, the plurality in the contemporary society is better constituted by what Riesman referred to as a “narcissism of small differences” (i.e., the standing out to be “in” or “cool”).

Also, any tolerance that is purported to follow this plurality may be argued to be a postemotional tolerance. Thus, we are careful to denounce racism against the Muslim community while simultaneously targeting it as a danger. We exclaim that the use of torture violates the moral standards of the United States, while simultaneously employing this practice in extreme forms (Mestrovic 2007). It is important to note that these contradictions are not incomprehensible. To be sure, they are quite evident. Then

why, one may ask, has a movement for social change in the pursuit of morality not been effective? The answer provided here is that the concern (i.e., sincere concern) with such apparent contradictions is not deeply ingrained in the individual, and subsequently, the collective super ego (an ingrained authority that serves as source of regulation (Freud [1930]1961; [1921]1961)).

In addition to facilitating the spread of postemotionalism, the prevalence of the death instinct is also experienced as a societal level compulsion to repeat. A collective super ego is weakened in the atomistic society. The immediate consequence of which is that collective guilt and remorse is debilitated. When the driving emotion is mass fear, the contemporary world tries to outrun its mistakes. As such, the goal is to not be the unfortunate who, because of their position, are not quick enough to escape the consequences of these mistakes. Only when we have come to realize that we would not escape global warming did it cease to be a hypothetical trajectory and become a very real and dangerous phenomenon. Previous to this revelation, it seemed as if we would die before we had to worry about it. Not until on the brink of a “massive” great depression in the United States (predicted to be bigger than the first (Hansell 2008)), was there a significant response to the “house of cards” economy. As such, these actions are not undertaken as an attempt to maintain and honor ingrained values; rather, they reflect actions that are driven by fear.

## CHAPTER IV

### SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

#### Summarizing Thanatos Society

To reiterate, the argument presented in the preceding sections is summarized as follows: with the advent of technologically advanced society and the destruction of grand illusions, desublimation worked to undermine the life instincts by promulgating false needs. As such, the higher need for meaning was inhibited at the individual level, and social integration through shared meanings was inhibited at the societal level. The resulting portrait of society is one of anomic, atomistic individuals seeking self-preservation at the expense of others. I have argued that this portrait may be depicted as the increasing domination of the death instincts over the life instinct (i.e., Thanatos over Eros).

As such, the depletion of sincere emotional integration gives way to the rampant spread of postemotionalism. A primary implication of postemotional society is that postemotional scripts become the prevailing moral guidelines (as opposed to an authentic super ego that instills a sense of guilt or remorse). As such, the death instinct manifests as a compulsion to repeat (i.e., destructive behavior is cyclical). In other words, because a genuine sense of wrongdoing is not incorporated into the individual or collective psyche, society and its members are doomed to continually repeat their mistakes. Under such circumstances, society and its members struggle in their attempts to choose the “right” course of action. Confusion and fear become pervasive. The

members of society turn on their social radars and attempt to tune into an “acceptable way” of behaving. Their moral action is as arbitrary as the postemotional scripts that inform it.

This argument is not a prescriptive one. However, what I am attempting to demonstrate here is that any understanding of how social and cultural change can occur may only be attained by addressing how society satisfies and thwarts human needs. Any argument that fails to capture this fundamental component will necessarily fail to evaluate and understand any notion of socio-historical progress.

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