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Belonging to oneself alone: The spirit of neoliberalism — Source link

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Belonging to Oneself Alone: the spirit of neoliberalism

Abstract

In the last three decades, neoliberalism has come to dominate most of the West, reshaping many institutions according to its ideological belief in markets as the optimal form of regulation of social and economic life. Whereas formerly market ideology was contested by collectivist ideas of the public good, at this point of its triumph there is little systemic opposition to it. Does psychoanalysis have distinctive insights to offer on neoliberalism, and if so, can they contribute to contesting its domination? Two starting points for such a critique are the relational ideas that are the foundations of psychoanalytic object-relations approaches, and the post-Kleinian theory of narcissism. Neoliberalism is engaged in the remaking of identities and subjectivities in individualist terms, and psychoanalytic ideas provide a resource for contesting its conception of human nature.

Keywords

Neoliberalism; Kilburn Manifesto; object-relations theory; narcissism

Belonging to oneself alone: the spirit of neoliberalism

Michael Rustin

The purpose of this article is to consider whether psychoanalytic ways of thinking can contribute to the understanding of neoliberalism. The paper was originally given at a psychoanalytic seminar in England[1] on the theme of 'belonging'. It was appropriate to consider neoliberalism in that context since the possessive individualism which ideologically underpins it – the doctrine that the maximisation of individual economic interests is the best means to advance the well-being of all - rejects the idea that humans are essentially social beings, for whom belonging to entities larger than the self, is essential to identity and wellbeing. One component of neoliberal ideology has explicitly attacked claims made for 'social goods', on the grounds that they merely mask the self-interest of the individuals or collectivities who advance them.

In *After Neoliberalism - the Kilburn Manifesto,*[2] currently being produced by *Soundings* magazine in on-line monthly instalments, with Stuart Hall, Doreen Massey and myself as its principal editors, a critique is being made of the dominance which neoliberalism has achieved over the societies of the West, and beyond, over the past thirty years and more.

> *Neoliberal ideas seem to have sedimented into the western imaginary and become embedded in popular 'common sense'. They set the parameters - provide the 'taken-for-granteds' - of public discussion, media debate and popular calculation. (*From the Manifesto Framing Statement).

We describe the ways in which neoliberal ways of thinking have come to pervade most aspects of life.

[1] This was a meeting of the 'New Imago Group', sponsored by the British Psychoanalytical Society, which holds an annual residential event to bring together psychoanalysts and academics.
[2] Each instalment is free online at http://www.lwbooks.co.uk/journals/soundings/manifesto.html, and is also published in printed form in *Soundings. http://www.lwbooks.co.uk/journals/soundings/contents.html*

> *Our argument here is that this vocabulary of customer, consumer, choice, markets and self-interest moulds both us and our understanding of and relationship to the world. These descriptions of roles, exchanges and relationships in terms of a presumption that individual choice and self-interest does and should prevail are a powerful means by which new subjectivities are constructed and enforced.* (From 'Vocabularies of the Economy'.)

In a recent instalment, we contrast the idea of the self-interested, satisfaction-maximising individual at the centre of this ideology, with an alternative 'relational' conception of human flourishing and well-being. We note that in every stage of human life – through infancy, childhood, schooling, the transition to work, in employment, at retirement, in old age and illness, and at the end of life, the care and understanding of others is essential to human development, and is often even essential for physical survival.

> *We propose that the entire basis of this debate, in the idea of the autonomous, self-seeking individual as the foundational 'atom' of the human world, is wrongly conceived. Human beings, we believe, are essentially social beings - individual freedom and choice, where they emerge and exist, are the outcome of delicate and precarious social arrangements, not primordial facts of nature.*[3] *A besetting fault - indeed pathology – of contemporary capitalist societies is that in their relentless advocacy of individual freedom, gratification, and possessiveness, they undermine the very social conditions which make its exercise, for most people, possible. (From 'A Relational Society'.)*

Capitalism has of course been a major if not a dominant force in western societies for several hundred years, since the development of market economies at the end of the Middle Ages. Its transformations of human capacities and of the material world have

[3] This idea that individuals are the outcome of complex social arrangements and relationships was the starting point of the field of sociology, in the work for example of Emile Durkheim in the second half of the nineteenth century. It was the ground for sociology's critique of the 'individualist' disciplines of economics and psychology as descriptions of the ontological foundations of human existence. The rise of sociology to prominence during the decades of the post-war welfare settlement, and the antipathy to it by neoliberals (in Britain, Thatcherism) from the 1980s onwards, reflects these differences in world-view, refracted in academic as well as in many other spheres of life.

been enormously beneficial - the gains for human beings of the enhancements of the conditions of life, measured by such basic indicators as life-expectancy, health, literacy, and civil peace can hardly be overstated. One of the reasons why simplistic kinds of anti-capitalism, or of 'environmental purism ('Nature comes first') , are untenable is because of the just claims of the populations of the 'emerging economies' (where they have even reached the point of 'emergence') to achieve comparable living standards, measured by the above indices, to those of our relatively fortunate selves in the economically advanced nations, and because of the sometimes positive role of capitalist institutions in bringing about this transition. However these living standards are now being seriously diminished in much of the European periphery – for example in Greece, Spain and Portugal – and for the majority of the population they have stagnated for some years in most of Europe and the United States.

Yet capitalism has never been the only social system, or pattern of values, operating within even predominantly capitalist societies. Some forms of relationship and connection have always been based on different principles than those of the pursuit of economic gain through market exchange. [4]

For example, there are norms of citizenship which require that all citizens be entitled to have their freedom protected by the law, regardless of their capacity to purchase 'security services' in the market. And that all citizens should have political rights, for example to vote, which are ascribed on a universal basis, not on the ability to buy them. There is even the idea that every citizen is entitled to a basic degree of material sustenance, through a welfare system of some kind, usually calibrated at a level which provides incentives to work. And similarly, entitlements to education and health, provided as the necessary conditions for participation in society, including economic

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[4] It should also be noted that the idea of the individual which has accompanied the development of capitalism has not only been a celebration of calculating 'economic man'. The idea of individuals as the bearers of creative powers and capacities, invested in their relationships with persons, materials and objects, might also be seen in a larger view as a product of capitalism, even though it has been opposed to 'economism', and has drawn on pre- and non-capitalist conceptions in its development (for example, on religious ideas of the sacred.) There are important differences between interest-maximising version of the individual (whose philosophical origins lie with Hobbes and Bentham), and a view of the individual as the subject of expressive self-realisation (Rousseau and John Stuart Mill are among its sources. It may thus be that the ideology of individualism can be fruitfully disputed from within, as well as from without. The attraction of consumer culture is that it has incorporated some 'expressive' aspirations within an economic social system whose main driver is nevertheless self-interest. (Rustin 2013a).

society. Writers such as Michael Walzer (1983), Arthur Okun (1975) and Michael Sandel (2012) have taken note of the 'blocked exchanges' which have curtailed the scope of market systems in many societies - the purchase of slaves, citizenship, public offices, children, and body-parts, for example, are now usually forbidden by law, although there are situations in which the power of wealth allows these prohibitions to be evaded. [5] For example, where peerages can be bought through political donations, or migrants (to the UK) are admitted only if they can meet a 'financial requirement'.[6]

What has been happening, with the rise to hegemony of neoliberalism (one can also name this system 'full capitalism') is that these spheres of autonomous, non-market values have been increasingly invaded by the ideologies and practices of markets. Because the relations between market and non-market spheres - between capitalist and non-capitalist value-systems - have always been combined in various intricate compromises (think even of the original constitution of the British National Health Service[7]) it is not always easy to discern the precise direction of travel. Because there is only limited public assent to the idea that economic self-interest is the primary source of social good, even those who are strongly committed to this ideology habitually dissemble as they seek to advance it. Thus the privatisation of the NHS in England and Wales, which is happening in plain sight, is officially denied both as a fact and as an object of policy. Or consider what is happening to educational universalism – the idea that society should provide equal educational opportunity for every child, furthering difference but not entrenching equality. The English school system is being fragmented, through the introduction of several different kind of providers, while the role of elected local authorities is diminished. This reform is being pursued with the pretence that its main goal is to benefit working class under-achievers, when its real intention and effect is to allow the reintroduction of covert pupil selection and to protect

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[5] Michael Sandel's 2012 book *Money Can't Buy: the Moral Limits of Markets*, gives many examples of the encroachment of the market in spheres where allocations were formerly made according to principles of equality or need.

[6] Contrast this with the famous inscription on the Statue of Liberty:
"Give me your tired, your poor,
Your huddled masses yearning to breathe free,
The wretched refuse of your teeming shore.
Send these, the homeless, tempest-tossed, to me:
I lift my lamp beside the golden door."

[7] With its tolerance of a private sector, with its GPs operating as independent professional practitioners, and with the role of pharmaceutical and other corporations providing vital goods and services).

the life chances of those from more advantaged families. The balance of power between the owners of capital and those who depend for their living mainly on their labour has shifted to a major degree in favour of the owners, as the rights and powers which have formerly protected employees are undermined through, for example, health and safety at work legislation, employment protection, rights to collective bargaining, and minimum wage requirements. The rationale for this is that such ‘flexible labour markets’ are necessary to meet the competition of emerging economies. Thus a global market exercises its pressures on the entitlements of employees in every locality. In politics too, the idea of equal citizens’ entitlements is compromised by the power of the institutions of capital to make demands upon governments outside of any democratic process (what the bond-holders demand trumps what the voters might want their governments to do), and by corporate influence on party funding and on the media of communication. (Crouch 2004 and 2011.)

In an economy devoted to acquisition and consumption, commercial popular culture and advertising does much to propagandise its world-view. The saga of the English football Premier League transfer deadline in August 2013 was revealing in this respect. The most celebrated events were the transfer of Gareth Bale to Real Madrid for £86 million and of Mesut Özil to Arsenal for £42.5 million. Arsenal fans had demanded that Arsène Wenger prove his virility in the transfer market by making a purchase on this scale. They and other clubs’ fans appear to be mostly indifferent to the sources of their favourite clubs’ money, and any ethical issues which this might involve. It seems possible that the game of Fantasy Football, in which participants ‘manage’ virtual teams with imaginary transfer budget, has become a significant influence on fans’ relations to their sport. In fantasy, we can thus all become entrepreneurs now.

What is striking about this situation is the absence of any articulate or coherent alternative to the ideological system of market exchange through which these mchanges in our society are being effected. It is not that most people like what they see is going on. It seems that they don’t, since opinion polls show that they hold most politicians and bankers, and many corporations, in low regard. Often popular anger is diverted away from what is of greatest importance (several issues in *Psychoanalysis, Culture & Society* 19(1) have discussed this diversion – psychoanalytically we might say unconscious projection – of antagonism and resentment towards the poor and the

vulnerable). For example In Britain there was a scandal in 2011 causing great public outrage in which several Members of Parliament were shown to have made false or excessive expenses claims. Although this was an unedifying instance of the political class abusing its power, the sums of money involved were generally quite small, whereas large banks and corporations continue to cost citizens billions in avoided taxes, or in subventions and bail-outs funded ultimately by taxation, but receive much less attention or criticism from the major media.

What most publics do not now have available are different organised ways of seeing the world, of a value-based kind, which would enable them to say, of an invasion of a relationship until now organised according to a norm of universal entitlement or gift, 'No, this act of marketisation violates an important principle.' The great loss involved in the discrediting of 'socialism' (both in its Marxist and its more 'ethical' or Christian versions) is that its ideologies had bundled together, in some kinds of coherent synthesis, different aspects of a non-marketised conception of the world. In an earlier period, prior to 1980, there were opposed principles being contested when major political decisions were being made, and negotiation and debate between them took place. But more recently, clear differences of principle between the political parties are hard to find.

In the earlier post-war period, the principles of the market had to compete with different values, and it was not assumed that market criteria were the only ones that mattered. For example, value was assigned to the family, as a source of well-being which needed support, when the welfare state was established - welfare was not then merely a system to incentivise participation in the labour market. In the sphere of schooling, importance was attached to the development of the imagination and of a diversity of capacities in pupils, goals which were much broader than the mere skilling of future employees to which education is being reduced. There was commitment to the idea that the rights of labour need to be supported, to rebalance an otherwise unequal system of market exchange. And to the idea of 'the commons ' (Polanyi 1944, Bollier and Helfrich 2013) a principle of shared social ownership of natural resources such as land – as the rationale for protecting the natural environment and public access to it. Thus the power of markets was circumscribed by boundaries, defining different spheres of intrinsic value.

In the absence today of any alternative synthesis of non-market perspectives of a coherent kind, each of these separate spheres of value and practice is left to struggle on its own, through its own pressure groups, NGOs and campaigns. Political parties have become weak aggregators of different interests and claims, but find it difficult to articulate these within a coherent view of the world and its alternative possible futures. Even with the British Conservatives, where neoliberal ideology is the most powerful driver of what they do, their public rhetoric often seeks to conceal this, for example with Cameron advocating a 'Big Society' at the very time when its programme of marketisation was undermining most social bonds, and when its withdrawal of state funding from voluntary organisations was weakening many of the agencies on whose activities the idea depended.

Colin Crouch (2013) has valuably pointed out that even the rule of markets is now more an ideology which masks corporate dominance, than the economic reality. Large corporations are increasingly able to destroy competition through monopolistic practices, through their influence on government, and through the media and political financing of the electoral process. Many governments are coming to resemble the 'executive committees of the bourgeoisie' (the owners of capital) of Marx's description. While Marx's conception of how a transition to socialism might be achieved was deeply flawed, his analysis of the unstoppable global dynamic of capitalism remains unrivalled. (Desai 2002).

One can wonder whether neoliberalism is now coming to constitute a 'totalitarian' phenomenon. By this I mean a system whose doctrines function as fantasies about how the world is and should be, and whose holders of power cease to take account of the discrepancies between fantasy and fact, and thus fail to see the need to engage critically with reality. Neoliberalism is in most situations (though not all, if one considers for example episodes of 'shock therapy' in post-Allende Chile or post-Gorbachev Russia) a slow-burning kind of totalitarianism, in that while its believers hold that its enemies and its others need to be pressured, weakened, re-educated and disciplined until they exist no more, they mostly deploy means to this end which fall short of physical violence. This is different from the implementation of the more radical 'elimination fantasies' of the Jacobins, the Stalinists, or the Maoists (or indeed of

Cambodia under Pol Pot or Chile under Pinochet) where extremely brutal means were deployed to bring social realities in line with the totalitarian rulers' motivating fantasies. These were always, in paranoid-schizoid mode, about the imagined locations of progress and reaction, of pure good and pure evil.

A Place for Psychoanalysis in this Debate?

The question to be asked is whether psychoanalytic ways of thinking have anything to offer us in understanding the world of neoliberal hegemony. This is different from asking what psychoanalysts as individuals, or even as professional organisations should do, for example in standing up for the survival of their NHS or voluntary sector psychotherapy clinics against demands made in the name of market forces. Those are matters of good citizenship, and while psychotherapists should take on their civic responsibilities like everyone else, the most important contribution which psychoanalysis can make is surely in providing some distinctive understanding of this system, and also perhaps in inventing practices which might challenge its direction.

Successful psychoanalytic interventions in major political debates in modern times are a rarity. However one leading example is that of Hanna Segal's contribution to the debate about nuclear weapons in the 1980s (Segal 1987). Her distinctively psychoanalytic idea was that the postures of the Cold War, on both sides, were sustained by the unconscious allure of the idea of mass destruction. This desire was of course denied by each side in the conflict, and projected in paranoid-schizoid fashion on to the other. Curiously enough, this symmetrical projection of deadly intentions did give some psychological stability to the antagonisms of the Cold War. Rational actors within the governing systems on both sides (Robert McNamara was one such, so far as nuclear strategy was concerned) at the same time made efforts to reduce the risks constituted by the trigger-ready nuclear arsenals. Only if these unconscious predispositions - a version of Freud's death instinct in her view - were consciously recognised, she implied, would anything be changed.

Some of the paranoid-schizoid anxieties of the nuclear arms race and the Cold War were unlocked, primarily by Gorbachev (with help from the European anti-nuclear campaigns) just as related anxieties were unlocked in South Africa by Mandela. But the structure of feeling in the West at the end of the Cold War became merely triumphalist,

with a general inability to feel pain or remorse for the terrible risks that had been taken. Far from allowing the emergence of feelings of respect and reparation towards the defeated enemy, the prevailing motive was to drive Communism from the face of the earth. Thus, in the absence of mourning or remorse, and remaining within the paranoid-schizoid structure which had sustained the Cold War one enemy (Communism) was simply replaced by another ('Islamic fundamentalism') enabling the West to remain on a permanent war footing with scarcely any interruption. This is the continuing 'war on terror' (since its enemy is so nebulous, the term is almost an invitation to terror in itself), but it has led to a continuing series of actual wars in the Middle East, in Iraq, Afghanistan, Libya, and by proxy Syria, to name only four. Segal had predicted before the first Gulf War that this paranoid-schizoid structure (with all the material and political interests which depended on it) would need and would find a new object, and events demonstrated the power of her essentially psychoanalytic insight.

Can we develop a correspondingly insightful analysis of the unconscious dimensions of the hegemony of neoliberalism, which might enable psychoanalysts to make some useful contribution to this debate?

We might begin by thinking about the psychological concomitants of possessive individualism as a state of mind, at both an individual and a collective level. Psychoanalysts, certainly in its British 'object relations' tradition, holds that excessive reliance on the self arises from perceived or fantasied failures of relationship. Melanie Klein in particular rejected Freud's idea of 'primary narcissism' (and the slow emergence of the infant self into an awareness of others) holding by contrast that human infants are born with an innate expectation of relationship with and dependence on parental 'objects'. There seems to be an early innate awareness of siblings also imbued with ambivalence towards them. The Kleinian view of the Oedipal situation from the point of view of the infant is that it is as much concerned with the procreation of new (and potentially rival) babies as it is with libidinal desires towards the parents.It follows from this view that narcissism is essentially a form of defence, which arises from disappointment with or distrust of the 'objects' on which the self depends for its emotional sustenance. This defensive structure displaces one in which love for and identification with 'objects' (persons, in fact) are the primary basis of identity, in which the desires and needs of the self (which remain central to its well-being) have to take

account of the desires, needs and indeed complex reality of the other. This is Klein's 'depressive position', in which the self is able to take its place in a relationship in which it has responsibility to others, as well as itself. Its polar opposite of course is the 'paranoid-schizoid position', in which in which good and bad attributes, the objects of love and hate, are split between the self and those with whom it identifies, and others who are conceived as alien and hostile.

The post-Kleinian theory of narcissism, developed by Britton (1998, 2003), Rey (1994), Rosenfeld (1971), and Steiner (1993) identifies an organisation of the personality through which the self is able to avoid the polar positions of depressive and paranoid-schizoid states, since each in their different ways is liable to generate intolerable levels of anxiety. Instead, in this 'borderline' state, a posture of emotional neutrality or indifference is adopted. The self learns to survive and even prosper in a world in which relations with objects cannot be depended on, adopting strategies of prudent self-reliance to cope with what is felt to be at root an untrustworthy and unfriendly world. Rosenfeld developed a key distinction between libidinal and destructive narcissism (mapping the concept of narcissism on to Freud's idea of life and death instincts), to differentiate between individuals who were primarily motivated by self-idealisation and by the denial of negative feelings, and those whose internal identification was with a destructive object, envious of life and sustaining its identity through covert or overt contempt for others. Destructive narcissism is especially difficult to treat in psychoanalysis, since it is the analytic process itself which is liable to be belittled and attacked.

Suppose we connect these ideas to a widespread experience of a world whose social bonds have become for many people weaker than they once were. Families have become smaller (although more long-living) so the numbers of kin with whom most individuals will feel a relationship is small. Religious belief and membership has also declined, although of course this is subject to much variation, communities of recent immigrants for example often relying heavily on flourishing churches, mosques and temples to maintain social identities and connectedness. (Other contributors to these linked issues of PCS have pointed out the unusual religiosity of people in the United States, suggesting that this is a consequence of the deep existential insecurity of American life.) Trade unions, political attachments and their cultures have become

weaker, thus lessening another mode of 'social solidarity'. For all their hardships, it seems that the industrial and mining communities of Wales, the North of England, and Scotland, and their equivalents in other countries, developed cultures which had many strengths. [8] For many, localities have become weaker nodes of identification. For example, the hollowing-out of the High Street, and the relocation of a great deal of commerce in impersonal malls and in on-line shopping (this process is still more advanced in the UK than in the USA) removes many opportunities for face-to-face encounters, and for relationships which although limited in their scope, were more substantial in terms of mutual awareness and respect than are the connections usually made at a supermarket checkout or with Amazon. Ryanair, a highly successful low-cost Irish airline operating in the UK, for long almost made a virtue of its indifference to its customers' well-being, until finally the reputational damage done to it by its habitual rudeness seems to have led to a change of heart by its C.E.O.

Against this must be counterposed the many opportunities which consumption-oriented, individualised societies offer to people. In face of the threatened depersonalisation and isolation of multiple market-places, intense efforts are made to make commercial transactions occasions which give some of the satisfactions of human recognition. In fact, even conversations with an 'agent' at a call centre can be agreeable, when the operation is a well-organised one, and if the caller tries to make something of the human contact. Looking at publicity from a conference I attended recently at the University of Hertfordshire, given out both by the University and by Hatfield House (stately home of the Marquess of Salisbury, but also now a multi-functional centre for leisure and tourism) one noted the diversity of 'offers' being made of enjoyable and more or less educative activities around Hatfield by both institutions. Diagnosing the costs and benefits of provision in this individualised, customerised world, is not simple. Ryanair was unusual in its brutal repudiation of the ethos of customer-care.

[8] There is a substantial literature about this, for example Richard Hoggart's *The Uses of Literacy* (1957) Michael Young and Peter Willmott's *Family and Kinship in East London* (1957), and Brian Jackson's *Working Class Community* (1968). The cultural renaissance in Britain of the post-war period owed a lot the emergence of the new 'voices' of a generation of people from working class backgrounds who were given educational opportunities for the first time.

For myself, I note that it is possible to hold more-or- less radical or socialist convictions, yet live in a rather old-fashioned way. For example, married to the same person for 50 years, and working for the same university for 49 years. Occupying the same house for 40 years, two miles from children, grandchildren, and other close relations. Even my political and cultural attachments have been long-lasting, in virtually lifelong attachment to successive re-incarnations of the 1950s New Left, and, from a little later, to the culture of psychoanalysis. This is hardly a state of rootlessness. Nor is it so exceptional.

Nevertheless, one expects that the concomitant of the general weakening of social ties and interdependencies which the hegemony of neoliberalism brings about will be increased degrees of anxiety, and what we can call, following Menzies Lyth (1959), unconscious defences against anxiety. This is most obviously seen in those inhabiting the most disadvantaged parts of the social system. Richard Wilkinson's and Kate Pickett's demonstrations (2010) of the consequences of greater inequality for health and well-being are momentous in this respect. They argue – indeed demonstrate with strong statistical evidence - that disrespect, powerlessness and vulnerability cause illness and disease. Epidemics of obesity, and the persistence of tobacco addictions and alcohol abuse in low-income populations, are, in their argument, the effects of poor self-esteem. 'No one cares about us, so we cannot care for ourselves', is the implicit story.   The widespread contemporary incidence of depression and of mediatised treatments for it, is another symptom of a pervasive anxiety which is by no means confined to the worse-off. Another is an epidemic of eating disorders among the privileged. The public response to the 2007-8 financial crisis may be another symptom of pervasive unconscious anxiety, in this case about public greed. The economic sacrifices which have been imposed by the UK's Coalition government seem to have been felt by many to have been a deserved punishment for 'living above our means', even though this idea of a shared guilt is tendentious. It is remarkable how difficult it has been to hold the banks and the financial sector responsible for a collapse which was primarily of their making.

Another function of pervasive social anxiety is the unconscious desire to displace disrespect and the self-contempt to which it gives rise on to some other object. Antagonism towards migrants, asylum seekers, and alleged 'benefit scroungers' has

become a major current of feeling in contemporary Britain, and is being mobilised by populist politicians, such as Nigel Farage of the UK Independence Party. However it is not only the powerless victims of the market free-for-all who become caught up in this kind of scapegoating intolerance. Another feeling which is mobilised is the unconscious guilt of the relatively fortunate, for the neglect of or damage to others which is implied by their own privilege. This is the 'depressive' side of this unconscious 'defence against anxiety'. There is a 'contamination anxiety' too, the paranoid-schizoid aspect of this defence, expressed in the belief that that mere association with the less worthy may 'rub off' on the self, and imperil its success. This manifests itself in a kind of thinking-by-classes, in Matte Blanco's term (Matte Blanco 1988) Thus, students can be evaluated by reference to the elite, world-class or other status of the university they attend, as if the merit of their university (measured by various aggregate measures of performance) can be claimed as their personal merit too. This seems like an unconscious default to a belief in 'natural' hierarchy, earlier founded on the claims of noble or gentlemanly birth, now transposed to the meritocratic worth conferred by membership of educational institutions of reported 'excellence.'

Both anxieties find expression in social avoidance and self-segregation. Earlier principles of egalitarian allocation of goods and resources entailed as their consequence socially diverse neighbourhoods. Public and private housing were often in spatial juxtaposition. Schools had mixed social intakes. Even now, NHS hospitals bring patients from all sections of society into mutual proximity, and allocate care to them by reference to their clinical need. But in the current environment, what the ability to pay is able to buy are neighbours of a certain class, who become exclusive co-users of facilities such as schools and private parks. 'Gated communities' , with the concerns about security and their restrictions on freedom for children are an extreme instance of such chosen segregation[9] , which perhaps arises in part from paranoid anxiety among the privileged about the envy of others, and from the fear of their imagined retribution. The more widespread pattern is the social 'zoning' of cities into neighbourhoods stratified by economic level. While such zoning is of course far from new, it is being accentuated by increasing inequalities, and by the weakening of non-market methods

[9] A block of new flats 100 yards from my house near Kilburn station has a locked gate and underground car-park, a high mental fence and security lights, whereas the hundred-year old, and much more attractive mansion block next door has none of these - a local indicator of changing times.

and criteria of housing allocation which were designed to countervail those of the market. [10] Prior to Margaret Thatcher's assault on local authority housing, for example via her 'right to buy' legislation, and by the transfer of properties from local authority ownership to that of housing associations, one third of households in the UK were living in properties owned by local councils. The proportion is now a fraction of that. However the 'dream' which inspired this change, the idea that nearly every family would come to 'own its own home' has become chimerical, as rising prices put house ownership out of reach, in London and the south east of England, of people of average income. Housing supply in Britain is a singular instance of market failure.

This kind of separation of groups into more and less advantaged by market forces now also has a huge regional expression in Britain, in the difference between the levels of affluence of the south-east, and some other zones of southern England, and its absence in those other parts of Britain whose prosperity depended on now vanished industries.

The Pathologies of Neoliberalism

What I am suggesting is that the denial of relational needs inherent in the ideology of neoliberalism and the all-pervasive market is a source of widespread anxiety and psychic pain, an invisible burden detracting from the benefits and opportunities which can arise from market competition. Whilst its most obvious bearers are those most disadvantaged in competitive environments, these are by no means its only victims. The expectation that the defended, narcissistic self which is shaped in this context will treat others primarily as means to its own ends, rather than objects of value in themselves, depletes the self as well as its objects.

In an earlier paper, 'States of Narcissism', Margaret Rustin and I took note of the consequences of the restructuring of universities into quasi-corporations, preoccupied with maximising their measured outputs in a competitive system, for the identity and

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work-satisfaction of academics. (Rustin and Rustin 2011). We argued that a narcissistic form of 'social character' was being nurtured by this system. The primary objects or ends of university life - the academic's 'subject' and his or her students – were becoming means, to the enhancement of status and reputation. What comes to matter is not the intrinsic meaning of work in a subject, or with a student, but how this work is perceived and measured.[11] The CV becomes a more intense object of concern than the work which it summarises.

Narcissistic withdrawal from engagement with the primary realities and needs of working tasks takes other forms. Child care catastrophes in Britain have revealed organisations and their staffs functioning in essentially unseeing and unthinking ways, declining to take notice of danger-signs that should have prompted remedial action (Rustin M.E. 2005).[12]

This argument has been broadened to characterise the psychopathology of the entire welfare system (Cooper and Lousada 2005). The intrusive processes of monitoring, target-setting and regulation which are used to constrain 'public' value-driven organisations to behave like market-oriented ones, provide many opportunities for individuals to become immersed in obsessional routines and measures, while losing sight of the central purpose of the work in question.

It is by constraining individuals to accept this redefinition of their everyday reality, and to comply with it in order to avoid sanction, that the new subjectivities of neoliberalism are routinely produced. The system's mode of governmentality, in Foucauldian terms, (Foucault et al 1991) 'designs in' the production of a self-regarding self, by the ways in which it rewards self-interested behaviours (and sanctions their failure), and attacks commitments to objects, values, and relationships with others. One can see the pressures of this system within many contexts of working life, in which intrinsic motivational goals become displaced by extrinsic ones. This development must also

[11] Roger Burrows' (2012) powerfully shows how many disciplines of quantity and rank imposed on faculty and students alike are transforming the nature and purpose of university education. He describes an extensive Foucauldian process of remaking the human subject, into an entity compliant with the ethos of the neoliberal order.

[12] John Steiner's (1993) idea of 'turning a blind eye', originally describing what had escaped everyone's notice in Sophocles' *Oedipus Rex,* has been influential in characterising an aspect of the borderline or narcissistic state of mind.

have its concomitant in the earlier years of life, when, according to psychoanalysis, basic personality formation takes place. The formative process here must be the diminished capacity of parents (or others) to be a primary nurturing presence in children's lives. If narcissism is defined as a defensive response to their absence of dependable, loving and trustworthy relationships, at any stage of life, then the difficulties for parents and others of providing such care must a factor in its causes. The pressure of working lives on parents, the break-up of residential communities and thus extended family relationships, addictions to consumption as a surrogate for love, celebrity identifications as a substitute for the real, dependence on 'virtual' worlds for emotional sustenance, the projection into children of parental anxieties about success and failure, and of course the more acute social symptoms of drug addiction and family breakdown, all lessen the emotional containment available for children and young people's development. Generalisation is nevertheless difficult in this sphere, since while one strong tendency is towards the instrumentalisation of relationships, there are counter-movements seeking to enrich them, for example in greater commitments to paternal and maternal involvement in the care of children, and a deepened vocabulary of emotions in contemporary culture, an aspect of its partial 'feminisation'. There is still a considerable resonance in Christopher Lasch's famous critique of the *Culture of Narcissism'* (1979). But where he was inclined to hold its primary cause to lie with the breakdown of social bonds due to excessive aspirations and demands for self-expression and self-realisation (with the 'sixties generation' and feminist critics of the family among the culprits), our analysis here – of a different phase in this development - is more focused on the systemic and indeed political inculcation of an ideology of instrumental self-interest and unthinking institutional compliance as its main cause. In fact, the enemy of creativity and fulfilment in this system is as much its antipathy to understanding and reflection as it is its deficits of love, an idea which W.R. Bion (Bion 1962, O'Shaughnessy 1981) has made central to psychoanalysis.

Where a private sector institution already has profit-making as its central goal, such displacements of purpose may be less visible - although even in the corporate sector these degenerative processes can be seen. For example, when a company formerly committed to its own distinctive products, and to a relationship with its workforce in which there is some sense of shared commitment and obligation, finds that it has to abandon these values because of pressures of market anxieties, or because, following

a corporate takeover, new owners appear interested only in short-term returns. There is a question of whether a single- minded preoccupation with markets may not in any case undermine the conditions of success within them. Sometimes what is made and the way in which it is made has to be valued for itself, for there to be anything which will have much of an exchange value.

There is, I hope, the basis of an argument here, concerning some self-destructive attributes of neoliberal ideology and practice. Where relational needs are unmet, and respect and recognition to people are denied, human capacities will be undermined. The anxieties arising from failures of dependency and trust will impact both on the most obvious 'failures' in competitive environments, but also on those who appear successful. Blame and avoidance (including that involved in willed ignorance of others' circumstances) will follow as unconscious defences against both paranoid-schizoid and depressive anxieties, both among the relatively successful and unsuccessful. The effect of turning a blind eye is to make us increasingly blind.

A large problem in this situation is a self-sustaining momentum which such defensive responses can acquire. The mistreatment of victims leads to yet more fear, anxiety and guilt about them. Since everyone is liable to be exposed, at their own 'level', to similar pressures to prove their worth, there will seem to be little space to seek out ways of being involving greater trust or compassion. If one is positioned on a slope which is getting ever steeper, it is hard to think about anything beyond keeping one's own foothold.

Where we now are is, I fear, on this slope. The question is whether the arguments that need to be made for 'belonging' and 'relationship', in all its various forms, and for the social systems and practices necessary to sustain this, can gain sufficient traction to make a difference. [13] And whether a psychoanalytic perspective on unconscious defences against anxiety can add anything valuable to the political and moral arguments against fundamentalist individualism.

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[13] At an earlier time, it took a World War, and the struggle against the violent Nazi version of a competitive ethos, to generate sufficient social solidarity for more relational values to find a significant space. When the enemy is literally within, in those parts of ourselves shaped by these defensive narcissistic structures, change is more difficult to bring about.

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