

A Theory of Mental Health and Monopoly Capitalism

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As an exposition of capitalism's contradictions, *Monopoly Capital* remains one of the most influential treatises in Marxist political economy produced in North America.¹ Its theoretical core was its critical commentary on the structure and operation of monopoly capitalism. However, as its subtitle, *An Essay on the American Economic and Social Order*, suggests, efforts were made to also offer historical and sociological accounts of U.S. society. Paramount among its sociological analyses was summarizing the reasons for and consequences of the exploitation of ethnic minorities, the persistence of poverty, the forces propelling urbanization and housing inequalities, and a damning critique of the education system. At all times, Paul Baran and Paul Sweezy grounded their criticism firmly within the context of monopoly capitalism, illustrating, as is fundamental to Marxist sociology, the relationship between economic organization and social formation.

Among their sociological investigations they identified the negative consequences of capitalism for mental health, drawing attention to the manner in which the organization of capitalist society conflicted with the essential needs of the individual. They proclaimed that neuroses derived from a state of alienation, which itself is an outcome of society barring individuals from having their inherent needs satisfied. Capitalism, it was argued, is incompatible with the development of positive subjective well-being, with neuroses pervading monopoly capitalist society.

At the time of their writing, Baran and Sweezy conceded that accurate measurement of mental health was difficult, correctly observing the challenges involved in its conceptualization and identification. They were firmly of the opinion that deteriorating mental health was increasingly becoming a phenomenon, arguing with certainty that monopoly capitalism had failed "to provide the foundations of a society capable of promoting the healthy and happy development of its members."² Over fifty years later, this undoubtedly remains true. In 2016, an estimated 21.5 percent of the U.S. population had a diagnosable mental health disorder, with this being similar for Australia and New Zealand, and rates of 16 to 18 percent

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for EU countries, including Norway, Iceland, and Switzerland.³ During the current era of monopoly-finance capital, disaffection at work is not only commonplace, but stress, anxiety, and depression prevail among the labor force. Additionally, a sense of estrangement characterizes many social relationships, while consumerism, which predominates as a method of leisure, fails to provide satisfactory fulfillment, promoting a shallow fleeting contentment and exacerbating a sense of dissatisfaction.⁴

Drawing on Baran and Sweezy's analysis, including that of Baran's individual investigation, the purpose here is to briefly sketch the relationship between monopoly capitalism and mental health. Monopoly capitalist society facilitates the growth of poor mental well-being, with negative mental health being a dialectical phenomenon that evolves from the antagonistic relationship between the mode of production and the inherent needs of the individual.

Psychological Development and Monopoly Capitalism

Any understanding of how poor mental health evolves cannot be separated from the wider process of psychological development. The product of conflicting forces, psychological development, Baran asserted, is a dynamic process primarily determined by the interaction of inherent biological drives and the mode of production. Any investigation into mental health under capitalism must begin with the "human being born with certain inherited characteristics and reared as a member of a class in capitalist society or—more specifically—in capitalist society's most advanced stage, the reign of monopoly capital."⁵ Capitalism is a crucial influence on individual psychology and any theorization of psychological development in isolation from material conditions lapses into a crude biological determinism in which the psyche and behavior are considered to be determined by forces largely emerging from a biologically constituted, fixed so-called human nature.⁶

Yet, biology cannot entirely be denied a role. Baran was clear that biological forces were influential, accepting the existence of *biotic constants*, that is, biologically based instincts as understood within psychoanalysis.⁷ For example, Baran and Sweezy accepted the existence of libidinal drives (biologically constituted instincts associated with the erogenous zones that seek pleasurable release of tension) as inherent to all requiring gratification.⁸ Any attempt to understand psychological development must therefore begin with and accept the existence of a broadly based, biologically constituted human nature comprised of inherent needs, consisting of at least the instincts of the libido and self-preservation as identified by Sigmund Freud. That this should be asserted in no way defies any position adopted by Karl Marx, despite claims that have at times attempted to impose a form of rel-

ativism on him. Marx was clear in recognizing the existence of a universal human nature as distinguished from that determined by society.⁹ As Erich Fromm argued, Marx recognized the existence of fixed drives, ranging from hunger and sex, to those Fromm referred to as *passions* – the need for individuals to demonstrate relatedness to each other and nature.¹⁰

However, that the evolution of the psyche emerges from the interaction between biological drives on the one hand, and the socioeconomic context on the other, is paramount, and there is no doubt as to which Baran gave primacy. Human behavior and subjectivity, Baran argued, could not be understood as anything but the “outcome of a dialectic interaction of biotic forces and the working principles of monopoly capitalism, with the latter dominating, subjugating, and directing the former.”¹¹ Thus, instinctual and biologically based energies, while significant, are nonetheless shaped by the mode of production and the economic foundations upon which society is erected.

While capitalism acts as an indispensable determinant of psychological development, we must be cautious to not be overtly economically deterministic. Without doubt, the labor process and society’s economic foundations have tremendously negative consequences for mental health, but a theory of poor mental well-being cannot reduce mental health to a direct one-to-one reflection of economic activity. For Baran, the social superstructure mediates the relationship between the economic base and the psyche, with the practices, operations, and institutions of society acting as “transmission belts which connect the relations of production prevailing in a given epoch to the psychic structure of the individuals living in that epoch.”¹² Although it is inexplicable to conceive of psychological experience evolving independently of the economy, it is not the mode of production that directly determines it – rather it is individual experience of both society and the labor process. While semiautonomous from the economic base, society is nonetheless influenced by and reflects the operation, needs, and requirements of capitalism. The mode of production is the primary overall determinant of mental health.

The Freudian Left

Advancing their theory of psychological development and mental health, Baran and Sweezy did not conceal the influence of Freud. But Freud was only a liberal critic of society. Never did he attempt a radical criticism of capitalism.¹³ Nevertheless, Freudianism became enormously attractive to some Marxists in the first half of the twentieth century, as its original impulse expressed a profoundly revolutionary spirit.¹⁴ Its rebellious appeal lay in its challenge to many of the dominant morals, values, and institu-

tions of bourgeois society. Moreover, it offered the opportunity to develop a dialectically materialist psychology.¹⁵ Freud formulated a theory within which conflict was central and psychological experience emerged from the interaction between instinctual drives and social reality. As Wilhelm Reich, an early exponent of blending Marxism with Freudian psychology, argued, the dialectical nature of psychoanalysis was epitomized by psychological development as the outcome of a conflict between materially existing biologically based drives and the material conditions of society.¹⁶ The approach of Baran and Sweezy exemplified this dialectical spirit of psychoanalysis. By integrating Freud's theories with Marxism, they firmly positioned themselves within a Marxian-Freudian tradition, as established by thinkers such as Fromm, Reich, Siegfried Bernfeld, Otto Fenichel, and Herbert Marcuse (who Baran was closely acquainted with and who profoundly influenced his understanding of individual psychology).

Despite divergent theoretical understandings of psychoanalysis, the Freudian left was united in its commitment to elucidating the sociological implications of Freud's theory. For Freud, instincts were chemically produced with physiological origins.¹⁷ Furthermore, he had identified the process of instincts adapting to and being modified by social reality, as determined by the individual's internalization of the external world, what he referred to as *the dominance of the reality principle*. However, psychoanalysis' evolution after the First World War, particularly in clinical practice, had culminated in a broadly static understanding of human nature, which was in large part a consequence of Freud himself. While not considering instincts as invariable, Freud conceived of them as evolving at a pace so stagnant that they could be regarded as fixed. Additionally, an implicit abiding acceptance of bourgeois society infused psychoanalysis and was considered by Freud to be the absolute type of social formation.¹⁸ This latter point meant that any sociological variation with differing consequences for instinctual adaptation and psychological development was largely ignored.

Sociological insight doubtlessly shaped Freud's analysis. The concepts of the superego, the reality principle, the process of sublimation (the displacement of libidinal energies toward nonsexual activities that do not threaten the social order), and that civilization depends on instinctual repression all magnify the sociological relevance of Freud's theory. Within the Freudian left, it was recognized that "Freud's theory is in its very substance 'sociological.'"¹⁹ Nonetheless, it was felt that orthodox psychoanalysis lacked the critical sociological awareness to accept that the social reality to which instincts adapt was not fixed, but variable, a reflection of specific historical socioeconomic circumstances. As Reich asserted, "the unconscious inferno is not anything absolute, eternal, or

unalterable,” but instead “a certain social situation and development has created the character structure of today.”²⁰ Similarly, Marcuse argued that “the reality which shapes the instincts as well as their needs and satisfaction is a socio-historical world.”²¹ While particular instincts may be, as Baran labeled them, biotic constants, the social context to which they must adapt varies, and the methods of their gratification, modification, and repression depend on the structure and operation of society at any given time, which for the Freudian left meant capitalism. Clarifying this, Fromm argued that “while the instinctual drives do develop on the basis of biologically determined instincts, their quantity and content are greatly affected by the individual’s socio-economic situation or class.”²²

Successful adaptation of the instinctual drives of the majority to the social context would result in all societies having their own broad libidinal structure, Fromm asserted. Later he would refer to this as the creation of a social character, whereby a broadly common character structure emerges as a result of the mass adaptation of unconscious drives to the social order.²³ Under capitalism, a shared instinctual structure “lends stability to class relationships.”²⁴ Likewise, Reich argued: “Every social order creates those character forms which it needs for its preservation...the formation of a psychic structure which corresponds to the existing social order.”²⁵ Reich asserted that class struggle and the preservation of capitalism constituted the ultimate purpose for the instinctual repression of the majority and the formation of a shared character.²⁶

Reich’s and Fromm’s understandings of exactly how the mode of production shaped character structure foreshadowed the position adopted by Baran nearly thirty years later. The influence of the mode of production on instinctual forces, Reich professed, was mediated through society and in particular, but not exclusively, by the family. “The economic structure of society – through many intermediary links such as the class association of the parents, the economic conditions of the family, its ideology, the parents’ relationship with one another etc. – enters into a reciprocal relation with instincts, or ego, of the newborn.”²⁷ From birth, he argued, the full instinctual satisfaction of each individual is either opposed or modified by the structure and operation of capitalism, and mediated through the economic organization of the family and other institutions of the superstructure.

Libidinal Repression

The libido preoccupied many within the Freudian left. For Marcuse, its “methodological sacrifice” was central to the repressive dominance of capitalism.²⁸ Libidinal satisfaction was also at the core of Reich’s Marxian psychoanalysis. Accepting that neurosis was the result of sex-

ual repression, the cure he argued for was its full gratification.²⁹ Its repression, however, was fundamental to creating a submissive character structure in order to protect capitalism.

Accepting the existence of libidinal energies is crucial to any understanding of the relationship between mental health and monopoly capitalism. Baran and Sweezy acknowledged the importance of the libido's gratification, recognizing the relationship between libidinal satisfaction and the growth of positive mental health. The displacement of libidinal energy for socially acceptable purposes was integral to Freud's understanding of social stability.³⁰ Nonetheless, they contended that sublimation was under threat given the inadequacies of monopoly capitalist society, with work and leisure activities in particular failing to provide sufficient outlets for the meaningful absorption of this energy.³¹ Reflecting the social changes of the era in which they wrote, Baran and Sweezy argued that it was not surprising that sex itself had emerged as the incomparable method to satisfy libidinal desires. Nevertheless, this did not necessitate true gratification as the acts of sex and love that were once forbidden, but had become more acceptable, had lost their emotional power. For them, this was in part a result of the commercial appropriation of sex as an increasing feature of the sales effort's methods of stimulating demand.³² Here, they echoed Marcuse, who also acknowledged the relaxation of sexual morals to a point that did not threaten the social order, proclaiming that libidinal dissatisfaction nonetheless continued as sexual freedom had been seized upon for profitable purposes.³³

Over the course of the last half century, while once dominant sexual taboos have been impaired, allowing increasing sexual activity, sexual dissatisfaction prevails, as Baran and Sweezy argued was also the case during the time of their writing. In this, they explicitly drew on Reich, who distinguished between orgasmic potency, defined as the uninhibited surrender to libidinal energies, and its opposite, orgasmic impotency, the repression of libidinal instincts during sex.³⁴ The latter, Baran and Sweezy argued, dominates monopoly capitalist society, with the repression of the libido giving rise to, as Freud, Reich, and Fromm had stressed before them, neurotic disorders.³⁵

Alienation and Psychological Development

Acceptance of libidinal energies demonstrates Baran and Sweezy's adherence to a core principle of orthodox Freudianism: that satisfaction is important for the development of positive mental well-being. Nevertheless, a truly Marxian understanding cannot be content with having at its center the libido alone. Bridging the gap between Freud and Marx, Baran

and Sweezy, like many within the Freudian left, embraced the concept of alienation, recognizing it as decisive for understanding mental health. Surpassing the libido in importance for Baran, alienation was, in his opinion, a significant reason for sexual dissatisfaction.³⁶

Alienation occupied a salient position within both Fromm's and Marcuse's understandings. By the early 1940s, Fromm had rebuffed the libido theory with alienation, but not libidinal repression – the preeminent negative psychological condition under capitalism. Biologically based drives such as hunger and sex were a real aspect of the human experience requiring satisfaction, but Fromm was at pains to stress that they were animal functions. Humans had transcended to a higher level of evolution.³⁷ Individuals were distinguished by being driven by unconscious passions, such as the need to express meaningful relatedness to objects, each other, and nature, directing their “faculties towards the world, rather than...use the world as a means for the satisfaction of... psychological necessities.”³⁸ Failure to experience relatedness would result in mental dehumanization and ultimately alienation.³⁹

The primary means through which individuals could express their relatedness, Fromm contended, was creative labor. In asserting this, he firmly endorsed Marx's own understanding of alienation. For Marx, labor was the essence of the individual. It should be a fulfilling experience, allowing individuals to be freely expressive, both physically and intellectually, interacting with both nature and each other. The product of labor should reflect the producer, with workers able to relate to it as something that meaningfully depicts their inner creativity. Alienated labor, Marx argued, results in a detachment of the individual from their own bodily and intellectual energies, with the labor process becoming “exterior to the worker.” Marx proclaimed: “It does not belong to his essence. Therefore he does not confirm himself in his work, he denies himself, feels miserable instead of happy, deploys no free physical and intellectual energy, but mortifies his body and ruins his mind.”⁴⁰ While creative and meaningful labor is crucial for optimal mental well-being, under capitalism, labor is nonetheless regularly alienating. It fails to be stimulating, is a miserable necessity, and thus constitutes a barrier to individuals experiencing their true humanity and expressing their relatedness to each other and nature.⁴¹

Although opposing Fromm's rejection of libidinal energies, Marcuse also identified alienation as significant, stating that the basis of capitalist society was predicated on the painful experience of labor failing to gratify individual needs.⁴² Under capitalism, adaptation of instinctual drives to the reality principle, Marcuse argued, contributed to the emergence of an alienated labor force. While methods of production go some way to fulfill

needs, the majority of individuals have little control over the apparatus of production and what is produced, having to submit to the mode of production in order to survive, performing predetermined specialized tasks that are far from fulfilling. Under these circumstances, the libido is repressed as its gratification is incompatible with the preservation of capitalism. Instead, this instinctual energy is directed toward socially useful labor, as defined by capitalism, which does not fulfill true needs. The result for individuals, Marcuse argued, is that, "while they work, they do not fulfill their own needs and faculties but work in *alienation*."⁴³ Being illustrative of the contradiction between sexuality and social organization, "body and mind are made into instruments of alienated labor; they can function as such instruments only if they renounce the freedom of the libidinal subject-object which the human organism primarily is and desires."⁴⁴

Alienation and Rationalism Under Monopoly Capitalism

In agreement with Fromm and Marcuse, Baran and Sweezy contend that alienation is *the* prevailing psychological condition under capitalism. Such alienation is a product of the deeply oppressive and demoralizing labor process coupled with the unfulfilling nature of both leisure activities and social relationships. Like Marcuse's identification of techniques of administration as imposing on the pleasure principle to contain the libido, Baran's understanding of the growth of alienation and its relationship to mental health is underpinned by the dominance of rationalism.⁴⁵

During production, rationalization manifests itself in ways such as measuring inputs to obtain maximum outputs, standardization of production, cost-effective use of resources, and divisions of labor. The production process is governed by forethought, calculation, and deliberation in implementing methods most conducive to the maximization of profit. Ensuring the stability and success of a rationalist mode of production, Baran argued, a psychic structure must be encouraged whereby individuals possess and accept rational knowledge and aptitudes, and implement and act on deliberate calculations and forward planning.⁴⁶ The ramifications of rationalism for mental health, however, are potentially debilitating, constituting "one of the most far-reaching transformations of 'human nature.'"⁴⁷

Rationalism greatly weakens individuals' ability to be spontaneous and creative, fundamental characteristics of the human essence, with diligence and docility prevailing instead. Within the labor process, perhaps the most noteworthy means by which rationalism contributes directly to poor mental well-being is through the division of labor. During production, Baran and Sweezy assert, the imposition of specialized tasks is a profoundly dehumanizing process, preventing individuals from fulfilling

their creative potential as they are “imprisoned in the narrow cells prepared for them...their faculties stunted and their minds diminished.”⁴⁸ Repetition and standardization of behavior during labor dulls creative energies, helping to instill an acceptance of rational values as its dominance imposes a system of rules, procedures, and habits of thought that constitute a “formidable obstacle to human development.”⁴⁹

The relationship between rationalism and mental health, however, exists beyond the labor process, with rational values having permeated society generally. Most tellingly, rationalism frequently governs relationships between individuals. In a competitive society in which the notion of the individual is celebrated and self-reliance and independence are considered virtuous while collectivism and solidarity are opposed, rationalist values dominate as individuals are frequently impelled to act in a calculated manner in order to compete against others for personal survival and professional development in the “attainment of success and the elimination of rivals.”⁵⁰ For individuals who only have their labor power to sell, rationalism is a framework of thought within which everyday decisions are made, calculating what is in their best interests to achieve goals and necessities, and ultimately material survival.

Undoubtedly, rationalist production methods have contributed to a considerable increase in the standard of living, but material advances have been achieved at the expense of repression.⁵¹ Permeating both the labor process and wider society, rationalism coerces the majority of society’s members “into a direction that bears no relation to the prerequisites for, and the needs of, human health, happiness, and development.”⁵² It ultimately constitutes the organizational form through which capitalism represses instinctual desires.

Hostility toward spontaneity and creativity is indicative of monopoly capitalism, as both, if allowed their freedom, pose serious threats to the stability of the system. Their repression gravely impairs the possibility for individuals to experience happiness as it diminishes the opportunity for creative and meaningful expression and sensual gratification.⁵³ Rationalism contributes greatly to individuals becoming alienated from themselves. “This alienation of man from himself,” Baran argued, “the maiming of the individual, the subjugation of his nature to the needs of the capitalist enterprise, the mortal wounding of his spontaneity, and the molding of his personality into a self-seeking, deliberate, calculating, and circumspect participant in (and object of) the capitalist process – represents the basic framework within which the psychic condition of men evolves in capitalist society.”⁵⁴ Under monopoly capitalism, the majority exist in such a state, prevented from experiencing their true humanity.

Recognizing the existence of alienation, Baran and Sweezy illustrated that the natural condition of the individual was constituted by more than libidinal and self-preservation instincts alone, as Freud contended. Exactly how spontaneity and creativity are constituted, is not something they explore in detail. However, adamant that psychological development is a result of the conflictual interaction between biotic forces and the mode of production, it can arguably be claimed that, for Baran, this resembled the somatic-psychic condition given by Freud to the instincts of the libido and self-preservation. Therefore, spontaneity and creativity can be conceived as having a corporeal being, and while not as ontologically identifiable as the libido, having their own material reality.

Like Fromm, Baran and Sweezy arguably accepted alienation as the foremost negative psychological condition under capitalism. "It is indispensable," Baran argued, "to recognize the vast extent to which the economic and social order of capitalism and the process of alienation which it generates mold the psychic and, indeed, physical functioning of men in the capitalist era."⁵⁵ Importantly, there is little doubt that, in their conception, alienation can be considered a neurosis in its own right, as it represents the fundamental failure of the psyche to develop in a healthy manner. Alienation is the foundation of neuroses and exacerbates them further, with Baran regarding it as the very context within which psychological development and poor mental well-being evolves.⁵⁶ In this framework, libidinal dissatisfaction is also included. Without recognizing the immeasurable impact of alienation on the psyche, Baran argued "it is impossible to understand sexual malfunctioning."⁵⁷ Alienation's consequence for sexual satisfaction largely rests with the denial of spontaneity that debilitates an individual's ability to truly express their emotionality. Therefore, the repression of spontaneity and creativity, and thus the development of alienation, can manifest itself consciously in the form of specific neuroses, including sexual dissatisfaction.

Under capitalism, many of the neuroses that exist as conscious phenomena are manifestations of the repression of the human essence. While specific forms of neuroses may be uniquely identifiable and have their own symptoms, they all constitute a form of alienation as psychological barriers to individuals experiencing their true humanity. As the primary psychological state under monopoly capitalism, a condition so entrenched in society, alienation assumes the status of pathological normalcy.

Monopoly Capitalism and Mental Health

Although not going into detail as to how alienation manifests itself, Baran and Sweezy argued without hesitation that poor mental health per-

meates the lived experience of monopoly capitalism. Apathy, disorientation, and emptiness dominate, assuming “the dimensions of a profound crisis.”⁵⁸ Fromm asserted that capitalist society was incompatible with human nature and that a distinction could be made between societies more or less conducive to meeting human need. Building on this approach, Baran and Sweezy highlighted those aspects of society considered most detrimental to mental well-being. The impact of the social superstructure on the mental health of individuals is to exacerbate alienation, encouraging its manifestation into a specific form of symptom commonly accepted in capitalist society as a mental health problem.

Work, as already illustrated, is central to the growth of alienation and in no way provides an outlet for the meaningful absorption of instinctual energy, with Baran and Sweezy arguing that “the worker can find no satisfaction in what his efforts accomplish.”⁵⁹ That discontent at work characterizes the labor process cannot be in doubt. In 2018, it was estimated that only 51 percent of U.S. employees experienced overall job satisfaction while 59 percent were sufficiently interested in their work.⁶⁰ Furthermore, in Britain at the start of 2018, it was estimated that 47 percent of employees would actively pursue new employment during the coming year, citing feelings of a lack of value and opportunities for progression as common reasons.⁶¹ Nonetheless, in the early twenty-first century, the objective need for repression for the purpose of labor declines relative to that required during more competitive eras of capitalism. As Marcuse argued, increasing productivity and rationalization meant that the quantity of instinctual energy directed toward work was in decline. However, while technological advancement may enhance the accumulation of capital, the weakening of repressive forces that accompanies it constitutes a threat, potentially unleashing needs for gratification that threaten the economic order.⁶² For Baran and Sweezy, therefore, methods of sublimation must be extended beyond the labor process if the stability of capitalism is ensured, and the inherent needs of individuals are regulated and satisfied in a way acceptable to capitalism.

Leisure constituted a potential source of sublimation, but one which ultimately reinforced alienation. Once having the purpose of reviving and stimulating creative energy, leisure has evolved to become characterized by intellectual stagnation, invoking and enforcing a sense of apathy and malaise catering to the “frailties and weaknesses in human nature.”⁶³ Leisure becomes a period in which doing nothing prevails, engaging in activities that make little, if any, intellectual demands. Dominant methods of leisure coalesce around popular culture and consumerism, which frequently intertwine, requiring the purchase of music,

books, television, and films, as well as being a spectator of sports, reinforcing passivity and docility and providing little means of stimulating critical thought and intellectual and creative energies.⁶⁴

Culture and leisure, as Baran and Sweezy argued, is an industry whose output is a commodity. As in the production process in general, rationalist methods dominate the culture industry, contributing to the standardization of cultural forms with similarities of structure but varying forms of originality effecting an air of individualism. While pretense of uniqueness constitutes a vital part of the sales effort, the standardization of structure is vital in invoking a repeated response from consumers. Standardization incites repeated interpretations and experiences, resulting in a standard reaction that reinforces the repression of spontaneity and creativity and promotes docility. Although proclaiming to promote and allow expressions of freedom, choice, and individualism, dominant methods of leisure have a tendency to conceal in their superficiality their function to solidify both repression and society's grip on consciousness. That there exists a relationship between materialism/acquisitiveness in general and poor mental health is clear, with acquisitive individuals having a greater disposition toward developing depression, loneliness, and low self-esteem.⁶⁵

Little solace, Baran and Sweezy argue, can be found in social relationships. With emptiness and detachment characterizing work, and leisure offering little in the way to express intellectual curiosity, friendships and social interaction also lack a solid base to be stimulating. Monopoly capitalist society offers few opportunities to develop bonds established on intellectual engagement and common interests. In this context, conversation descends to small talk.⁶⁶ Rationalization and standardization also infuse social relations. Spontaneous and emotional engagement with others is curtailed by the imposition of expected forms of behavior, especially within the workplace. Between colleagues and toward clients, customers, and service users, monopoly capitalism is infused with pretense as members of the labor force exhibit a surface-level disposition of politeness, cordiality, and helpfulness, expressing forms of behavior that are imposed on them to frequently mask their true feelings. From customer disgruntlement to wider experiences of exploitation and oppression, the expectation is for workers to behave as instructed and repress their true emotionality, displaying instead automated and standardized responses.

Additionally, loving relationships between partners are also challenged. As already illustrated, capitalism represses libidinal instincts and alienation stifles emotion, including the ability to express full feelings of love and experience sexual satisfaction, contributing to emotional misery

and hostility.⁶⁷ For instance, illustrating the main predictors of marital stability, Deniz Yucel identifies a strong relationship between sexual and marital satisfaction.⁶⁸ James K. McNulty, Carolyn A. Wenner, and Terri Fisher also point to the inextricable correlation between sexual and marital relationship satisfaction, with a positive experience of one impacting positively on the other.⁶⁹ Subsequently, a lack of libidinal gratification can potentially challenge the strength of any loving relationship.

Consolation and escape from emotional misery are often sought in either ending the relationship or through the active engagement of consumerism and leisure as a family to stimulate gratification from within the relationship. However, evidence suggests that such methods are futile. A plethora of studies exist demonstrating a negative correlation between materialism and marital satisfaction. As Ashley B. LeBaron, Heather H. Kelley, and Jason S. Carroll have illustrated, individuals within a relationship who place high value on materialism/acquisitiveness have a tendency to value both their partner and the relationship less as a whole.⁷⁰ Additionally, it has been identified that even in relationships where both partners are considered materialistic, dissatisfaction tends to be high. Materialistically inclined couples consistently exhibit poor quality relationships, mired by ineffective communication and conflict resolution, and a failure to recognize the needs of the other.⁷¹

Reflecting on the quality of life under monopoly capitalism, Baran and Sweezy argued that the experience of the majority was one plagued by feelings of apathy, malaise, and despondency. Only ever sketching their understanding of mental health, they nonetheless illustrated clearly the great challenge to obtaining optimal mental well-being as long as capitalism remained the dominant mode of production. Unflinchingly, they constructed a theory of mental health that recognizes the deep-seated incompatibility between capitalism and the needs of the individual. Poor mental well-being emerges from the antagonistic relationship between the economic imperatives of capitalism and the subjective needs of the individual that are either repressed or directed toward socially acceptable forms of gratification, ultimately stifling the natural and healthy development of the psyche. Saturating the lived experience of monopoly capitalist society is alienation, emerging from the repression of fundamental qualities of the human essence. Alienation evolves as both the neurosis of dominance and the context from within which identifiably specific neuroses develop. Without hesitation, it can be firmly claimed that a significant proportion of what constitutes poor mental health is deeply rooted in the oppressive nature of capitalism.

Displaying pessimism at the time of their writing as to the chances of capitalism being overthrown, Baran and Sweezy argued that “the more

likely course of development would seem to be a continuation of the present process of decay, with the contradictions between the compulsions of the system and the elementary needs of human nature becoming ever more insupportable," resulting in "the spread of increasingly severe psychic disorders."⁷² Over fifty years later, they have arguably been proven correct. Capitalism continues to reign supreme, remaining a great impediment to the development of optimal well-being and encouraging the growth of further mental health problems.⁷³ But this cannot be tolerated any longer. As Michael Yates passionately argues, capital's stranglehold on society has directly contributed to the growth of alienated conditions and challenged the foundations on which humanity and humaneness evolve. The working class has no choice but to fight back if the degradation of humanity, in all of its forms, is to be reversed.⁷⁴

Notes

1. Paul A. Baran and Paul M. Sweezy, *Monopoly Capital* (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1966). See *Monthly Review* 68, no. 3 (July-August 2016) for the continuing significance of *Monopoly Capital* fifty years after publication.
2. Baran and Sweezy, *Monopoly Capital*, 285.
3. Hannah Ritchie and Max Roser, "Mental Health," Our World in Data, April 2018.
4. David Matthews, "Capitalism and Mental Health," *Monthly Review* 70, no. 8 (January 2019): 49-62.
5. Paul A. Baran, "Marxism and Psychoanalysis," *Monthly Review* 11, no. 6 (October 1959): 191.
6. Baran, "Marxism and Psychoanalysis," 186.
7. Baran, "Marxism and Psychoanalysis," 190.
8. Baran and Sweezy, *Monopoly Capital*, 354.
9. Karl Marx, *Capital*, vol. 1 (London: Lawrence and Wishart, 1977), 571. In a footnote, asserting that human nature consisted of dual qualities, Marx argued we "must first deal with human nature in general, and then with human nature as modified in each historical epoch."
10. Erich Fromm, *The Crisis of Psychoanalysis: Essays on Freud, Marx and Social Psychology* (London: Jonathan Cape, 1971), 65.
11. Baran, "Marxism and Psychoanalysis," 199.
12. Paul A. Baran, "Reply," in *Marxism and Psychoanalysis* (New York: Monthly Review Pamphlet Series, 1960), 49.
13. Fromm, *The Crisis of Psychoanalysis: Essays on Freud, Marx and Social Psychology*, 42.
14. Bruce Brown, *Marx, Freud, and the Critique of Everyday Life* (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1973), 38.
15. Brown, *Marx, Freud, and the Critique of Everyday Life*, 41.
16. Wilhelm Reich, "Dialectical Materialism and Psychoanalysis," in *Sex-Pol: Essays, 1929-1934*, ed. Lee Baxandall (London: Verso, 2012), 27-48. While denouncing Marxism later in life and directing his attention toward the natural sciences, during the 1920s and '30s Reich passionately advocated a Marxist-inspired psychoanalysis, becoming arguably one of the foremost first-generation psychoanalysts to do so.
17. Fromm, *The Crisis of Psychoanalysis*, 66.
18. Fromm, *The Crisis of Psychoanalysis*, 141.
19. Herbert Marcuse, *Eros and Civilization: A Philosophical Inquiry into Freud* (Abingdon: Routledge, 1998), 5.
20. Wilhelm Reich, *Reich Speaks of Freud* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1975), 227.
21. Marcuse, *Eros and Civilization*, 14.
22. Fromm, *The Crisis of Psychoanalysis*, 155.
23. Erich Fromm, *The Fear of Freedom* (London: Routledge, 2001), 238-56.
24. Fromm, *The Crisis of Psychoanalysis*, 159.
25. Wilhelm Reich, *Character Analysis* (New York: Farrar, Straus & Giroux, 1972), xxii-xxiii.
26. Wilhelm Reich, "The Imposition of Sexual Morality," in *Sex-Pol*, 96.
27. Reich, "Dialectical Materialism and Psychoanalysis," 37
28. Marcuse, *Eros and Civilization*, 3.
29. Reich, "The Imposition of Sexual Morality," 92.
30. Baran and Sweezy, *Monopoly Capital*, 354.
31. Baran and Sweezy, *Monopoly Capital*, 354-55.
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If you wish to use Freud's model, there are *three* ways of discharging libidinous energy: 1. sexual activity, 2. sublimation, and 3. repression. The crux of the thing is that (1) is superior to (3) but *not* superior to (2); in fact, if (1) should be the *only* outlet, matters would be in lousy shape even from the standpoint of the libidinous household itself. The trouble with capitalist culture is *not* that it provides too little of (1) – of this there is actually a lot – the trouble is that it provides too little of (2). And it is by no means utopian ("badly" utopian, that is) to expect at a relatively early stage of socialist development a significant widening of sublimation possibilities.

— PAUL A. BARAN TO PAUL M. SWEETZ, August 3, 1959, in *The Age of Monopoly Capital: The Selected Correspondence*, ed. Nicholas Baran and John Bellamy Foster (New York: Monthly Review Press, 2017), 234-35.