

Exploring Mind and Soul of Social Character: Dialectic Psychodynamics of Economism and Humanism in Society, Organizations, and Individuals

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ABSTRACT

Building on and extending previous theorizing, this contribution draws on the critique of neoliberal ideology in conjunction with radical humanism to deconstruct the ambivalent normative foundations of applied psychology and related fields of social science. Presented is a systemically embedded and integrated dialectic and dynamic model of ideological undercurrents shaping the political-economic, social-institutional, and psychodynamic structures of society, organizations, and individuals. Integrating dialectic antipodes of genuine ideas versus interest-guided ideology with social character theory, neoliberal economic doctrines and antithetical humanist philosophical concepts are contrasted as opposing political, social, and psychological or “fantasmatic” logics. Based on psychoanalytic theory, neoliberal fantasies of success, superiority, and submission are derived from these and positioned against humanist consciousness of evolution, equality, and empowerment. This normative fabric of advanced capitalist societies is interpreted with reference to the conference theme as the mind and soul of social character. Economic psychodynamics are linked to social alienation, humanist antipodes to psychological fulfillment. Personal meaning is introduced as a meta-dimension of existential alienation, respectively, wellbeing. Stressing the fundamental unity of insights regarding external and internal realities, complementarity of denaturalization and critique of societal ideologies with critical self-reflection and personal development is recommended. In this sense, the presented analysis aspires to contribute to clearing the mind and strengthening the soul by cultivating radical humanist philosophy versus neoliberal economic rationality.

KEYWORDS: Neoliberal ideology, radical humanism, dialectic analysis, psychodynamics, social critique, ethical issues

1 INTRODUCTION

Building on a seminal model of neoliberal ideology [1, 2, 3] in conjunction with the psychodynamic tradition of analytic social psychology [4, 5, 6], objective of this contribution is to develop, deliberate, and promote a deepened, systemically embedded and integrated, as well as dialectic and fundamentally critical understanding of the antagonistic normative undercurrents shaping the interdependent political-economic, social-institutional, psycho-spiritual structures of society, work organizations, and individuals [7, 8, 9]. Neoliberalism, a vaguely defined and ambiguous concept, is rooted in classic economic theorizing that forms the ideological basis of capitalism, representing the current version of globally dominant political-economic doctrine [10, 11, 12]. The multifaceted and contradictory internal logic of this interest-guided system of ideas and practices has been critically analyzed elsewhere in detail and sophistication beyond the scope of the present discussion. For instance, neoliberalism has been deconstructed as simultaneously constituting a set of political and economic practices, a paradigm for reorienting (or dismantling) public policy and programs, a hegemonic ideological project, a mode of psychological control or “governmentality”, and a specific state form, designed to advance the particular interests of small class of capital owners, investors, top-level managers, and their political agents [13, 14, 15]. Neoliberal economism manifests in unconstrained scope and power of global financial markets and transnational corporations, worldwide commerce and consumerism, and decline of public services and social welfare systems. In short, neoliberalism normalizes the supreme rule of the interests of economic elites through a “totalization” of the logic of money and markets, accumulating unfathomable wealth and luxury for a small minority, while imposing increased personal risks and demands, austerity, and poverty upon the majority. The current contribution builds on, elaborates, and extends previous theorizing, documented in preliminary attempts to deconstruct the contradictory ideological basis of the applied field of work and organizational psychology and related disciplines, such as industrial, occupational or vocational psychology, organizational behavior, human resource management, and business and management studies [7, 8]. Recapitulating earlier arguments, this renewed undertaking is informed and guided by the adoption of thoughts and ideas from radical humanism, as propagated by social-philosopher and psychoanalyst Erich Fromm [4, 5, 6]. Integrating the dialectic distinction of original (genuine or authentic) ideas versus distorted (interest-guided) ideology with basic tenets of social character theory, neoliberal economic doctrines and antithetical humanist philosophical concepts are contrasted and positioned across nested levels of abstract political (societal), applied social (organizational), and implied psychological or “fantasmatic” (individual) logics [2, 7, 9]. The resulting matrix of interwoven logics is suggested as representing the dominant (explicit or propagated), respectively latent (potential or undeveloped), side of the normative fabric of advanced Western capitalist societies, institutions, and subjects [16, 17]. With reference to the conference theme, neoliberal and humanist components can be metaphorically interpreted as representing the mind and soul (or conditioning and consciousness) of contemporary social character. Notably, the conceptual development of the matrix model is work in progress and the following considerations are preliminary and partly fragmentary, subject to further elaboration, integration, and revision, intended to provide instructional and inspirational value as a basis for further discussion and deliberation in subsequent steps.

2 TOWARDS A MULTI-LEVEL DIALECTIC MATRIX MODEL

Social character theory posits that the socio-economic structure of society shapes personal orientations and psychological character structures among its members in a way that they want to do what they should to do [8]. Social character theory combines the Marxian dictum that the material conditions of life determine human consciousness with the dynamic conception of character in psychoanalytic theory [4, 5, 6]. Thus, the social character results from the interaction between dominant socio-economic structures of society and the socio-libidinous structure of individuals. As such, it is not a deterministic concept, but describes shared tendencies that vary according to the socio-economic status or social class the respective individuals occupy in the focal society. The unique character of a person is assumed to result from a dynamic interaction between collective social character tendencies and individual psychological predispositions, as well as person-specific socializing influences (e.g., familial circumstances). The social-philosopher and psychoanalyst Erich Fromm, theoretically developing the concept, has identified and analyzed different ideal types of the social character in different historical phases of the capitalist political-economic system, such as the hoarding, receptive, authoritarian, and marketing character [4, 5, 6]. Later, the ego-oriented character was identified as a complementary type in advanced Western capitalist societies increasingly governed by neoliberal doctrine and hegemony [5, 9]. Accordingly, societies can be evaluated according to the extent that they permit or promote, respectively, inhibit, impede, or undermine the realization of human potentials with regard to physical, social, and psychological well-being and health, including personality development and growth, higher levels of self-awareness, consciousness, and self-actualization. Advanced capitalist societies, however, are evaluated as psychologically “insane”, promoting destructive (e.g., egoism, greed, rivalry) and impeding “productive” behavior and character orientations (e.g., altruism, dedication, growth). Largely compatible with this assessment, the focal model of neoliberal ideology specifies individualism, competition, and instrumentality as core political logics or “dogmatic pillars” of economic thinking [1, 7, 9]. While these more abstract political logics are assumed to operate initially on the level of public policy and societal institutions (e.g., labor laws and market regulation), they also manifest in the applied social logics of hierarchically nested lower-level institutions, such as work organizations (e.g., management and employment practices). These, in turn, are suggested to influence the mindsets of individuals through psychodynamic processes analyzed as fantasmatic logics (e.g., idealized narratives and aspirations) [2, 9, 18]. Although several related social (e.g. individualization, contracts, quantitative assessment) and fantasmatic logics (e.g., meritocracy, social Darwinism, growth and progress) associated with neoliberalism have been suggested, it is unclear, how these reflect the three core political dogmas [1]. In earlier contributions, the authors have started addressing this issue, using the focal model of ideology to critically analyze and evaluate psychological research on flexible workplace practices [7, 8, 19, 20]. Individualism, competition, and instrumentality were seen as mirrored in the applied social logics of management practices emphasizing employee self-reliance (e.g., contingent employment), tournament situations or contests (e.g., internal labor markets), and economic rationalization (e.g., work intensification) [20]. Corresponding fantasmatic logics on the individual level were identified in mental frames of perpetual success (e.g., outstanding performance and achievement, excellence and exceptionality), superiority (e.g., outperforming and dominating others, winner-loser mentality), and submission under the rules of money and markets governing neoliberal capitalism (e.g. adaptation and assimilation, fulfilling social roles, seeking acceptance and status, tolerating inequality and injustice) [7]. The present contribution refines this suggested multi-level matrix model [1, 7, 20]. Additionally, it also elaborates the suggested dialectic extension of

complementary antipodes to neoliberal economism by discussing alternative sets of oppositional political, social, and fantasmatic logics based on ideas of radical humanism. Suggested antagonistic counter-principles, exemplifying philosophical concepts counteracting neoliberal political logics on the societal level, were radical humanist ideas of individuation, solidarity, and emancipation [6, 16]. Accordingly, on the organizational level of workplace practices, these more abstract, higher-level concepts were argued to manifest in applied social logics of self-actualization at work (e.g., personalized tasks), common good or community (e.g., sharing of resources), and social transformation (e.g., participatory change). Focusing on individually negotiated work and employment conditions, suggested ideological antipodes were used as an analytic grid to contrast the humanistic ideal of employee-oriented management practices that contribute to or facilitate psychological wellbeing, health, and personal development with the anti-type of a labor political power strategy, reproducing neoliberal agendas of divisiveness, austerity, and economic performativity [20]. On the individual level, fantasmatic logics of neoliberal ideology were contrasted with humanistic narratives and utopian aspirations of evolution, equality, and empowerment, discussed in the context of fulfillment of psychological needs for competence, relatedness, and autonomy [7]. Taken together, these fantasmatic representations are part of the psychological deep-structure and foundation of the higher-level political and social logics underlying the design of societal and economic institutions [2, 18]. The resulting dialectic multi-level matrix model is displayed in Table 1. The following sections describe each of the altogether 18 cells of the matrix, allocated to three levels and containing references to relationships to self, others, and authorities [4, 6, 9]. The latter taxonomy was introduced as additional organizing and structuring element, based on radical humanist theorizing on social embeddedness of identity, interactions, and institutions, reflecting the own person, other people, and structures of power, as central and interdependent foci of socio-psychological relatedness.

Table 1: Multi-Level Dialectic Matrix Model of Economism and Humanism in Society, Organizations, and Individuals

	Self (Identity / Person)	Others (Interactions / People)	Authorities (Institutions / Power)
	Societal Level	Societal Level	Societal Level
Political Logics of Neoliberal Ideology	Individualism Naturalization of individual self-interest and attribution of full responsibility for one’s own life situation; shift of societal risk toward individual members	Competition Markets as best way to ensure progress and optimal allocation of resources in all areas of society; competition and rivalry as inherent to human nature	Instrumentality Objectification and utilization of humans for particular interests according to cost-benefit calculations for maximizing performance and profits
Political Logics of Radical Humanist Ideas	Individuation Emphasis on conditions for personality development and self-transcendence; overcoming self-interest in meaningful social contexts and relationships	Solidarity Empathy, supportive social relationships, collaboration with others; sharing resources with those facing adversity; universality of human experience	Emancipation Revealing, overcoming and transforming limiting power-dependence relationships; liberation from oppression and exploitation
	Organizational Level	Organizational Level	Organizational Level
Social Logics of the Neoliberal Workplace	Self-Reliance Contingent employment with limited commitments; employees responsible for performance, health, learning, and careers	Contests Competitive allocation of performance-based rewards to individual employees based on zero-sum, winner-take-all-type tournaments	Rationalization Focus on increasing metrics of economic performance and efficiency; work intensification; employees as human resources
Social Logics of Humanistic Management	Self-Actualization Secure working conditions to support individual and collective autonomy, self-determination, learning, and socio-moral development	Community Seeking common good in diversity and pluralism; consideration of personal needs, win-win strategies, generative resources	Transformation Alternative organizing beyond hierarchies, coercion, and manipulation; promoting participation and democratization
	Individual Level	Individual Level	Individual Level
Fantasmatic Logics of Neoliberal Social Character	Success Idealizing excellence, outstanding achievements, and performance; exceptionality; overcoming odds of the situation	Superiority Focus on outperforming and dominating others, winner-loser mentality; inequality as result of individual differences and effort	Submission Responding adaptively to market forces; conforming with social roles, seeking status and recognition; system-justification
Fantasmatic Logics of Radical Humanist Consciousness	Evolution Attaining psychological growth and personality development; knowledge, self-realization, insight, higher-level consciousness	Equality Realizing the universality of human experience, dignity, and interconnectedness; perspective-taking for equal rights and social justice	Empowerment Active role in radical social reform, challenging and overcoming power structures, oppression, exploitation and inequality

3 POLITICAL LOGICS OF NEOLIBERAL IDEOLOGY

3.1 Individualism

On the societal level, core to the broader political, socio-economic, and cultural transitions in the era of neoliberal hegemony, is a fundamental value change towards a specific, socially corrosive form of excessive individualism [21]. This tendency, on the one hand, disproportionately emphasizes individual agency and self-interest. Thus, maximization of personal utility is declared not only an inherent part of human nature, but a rational and even desirable feature [13]. On the other hand, it attributes complete responsibility to individuals for their life situation, including education, occupation, wealth, health, and happiness. Thus, holding them fully accountable for their outcomes, while downplaying or neglecting situational influences and societal conditions, such as social stratification and inequality, privilege and discrimination, structural unemployment, and economic crisis, etc. [21, 22]. As such, neoliberal individualism serves the normalization and institutionalization of a “fundamental attribution error”, resulting in systemic shifts of societal risks and responsibilities towards individual members. In line with ideological objectives of neoliberalism, the resulting logic of complete self-reliance, or “hyper-autonomy”, effectively undermines, degrades, and erodes communal organization, collective pursuit of shared interests, and social support systems (e.g., labor unions, welfare systems, charity), as well as social cohesion, interpersonal relationships, and taking responsibility for others, on all levels of society [12, 13, 23]. In the matrix model, individualism as a political logic of neoliberal ideology on the societal level is suggested to manifest on the organizational level as a social logic of employee self-reliance in the neoliberal workplace, and on the individual level as a fantasmatic logic of success, integral to the neoliberal social character. These exemplary social and fantasmatic logics are discussed in more detail below. The dialectic antipode to a political logic of individualism is found in the humanist idea of individuation and its derivatives of self-actualization and evolution.

3.2 Competition

Representing unabated market fundamentalism, a second core feature of neoliberal ideology is dogmatic adherence to a political logic of competition as the only legitimate form of societal coordination and regulation [1, 12, 13]. In often biologicistic analogies, explicitly or implicitly drawing on ideas of social Darwinism (“survival of the fittest”), competition is “naturalized” as inherent to the human species and revered as the one best way to ensure efficient allocation of resources, performance, and progress in all areas of society and in domains of life [7, 8]. As the central institutions of neoliberalism, so-called “free markets” are idealized as “quasi-divine” entities, omnipotent and unfaultable, capable of reliably determining the value, ensuring availability, and improving the quality of all goods and services needed to advance human welfare within and across societies [24]. The expansiveness of the market form corresponds with progressive commodification of the world. Indeed, one of the most universal commodities is the work capacity (labor power) of people, competitively traded and utilized in the form of “human resources” on societal (external) and organizational (internal) labor markets [25]. According to the logic of competition, more and more areas of society are organized to resemble contests or tournaments, based on rivalry and winner-looser mentality, as a driving force in interpersonal relationships and interactions, corroding cohesion, collaboration, and prosocial (non-competitive) attitudes and behavior.

3.3 Instrumentality

The neoliberal political logic of instrumentality generally refers to the “objectification” and utilization of human beings for purposes that are not primarily in their genuine own interest, but serve the goals of those in positions of power and authority [26, 27]. For instance, in the logic of labor markets, people are conceptualized as tools or “resources”, traded and used (exploited) according to cost-benefit, means-end, or input-output calculations for the purpose of maximizing economic objectives, like profits, market share, or capital returns [20, 24, 25]. Instrumentality signifies the “reification” and commodification of human life and social relationships, criticized in the humanist tradition as a practical step towards political-economic fascism by negating or relativizing the absolute and unconditional value of human beings as ends in themselves [17, 27]. As such, instrumentality, the subordination of human life as a means to achieve monetary or material goals and interests, is truly at the core of economistic vs. humanist thinking. In the logic of instrumentality, the intrinsic value of human life, productive activity and social relationships are reduced to extrinsic (market-based) economic utility.

4 POLITICAL LOGICS OF RADICAL HUMANIST IDEAS

4.1 Individuation

Proposed as a dialectic antipode to the neoliberal political logic of “rugged individualism”, the conceptually antithetical and semantically proximal term of “individuation” was adapted from analytical individual psychology [29, 30, 31]. The main focus here is the individual person, their self, or identity, with regard to the humanistic ideal of fully developing one’s potentials and existentially becoming “who one is meant to be”. Considered a central property of the human condition, individuation is inherent in humanistic psychology in notions of personality development, personal growth, and (self-)insight, addressed in numerous concepts and ideas, such as following a calling or finding meaning, becoming a fully developed or fully functioning person, socio-moral development, self-realization, and attaining higher levels of (expanded) consciousness, as well as in transformational experiences of paradigm shifts, spiritual awakening, enlightenment, and epiphany [32, 33]. Contrary to neoliberal individualism, resulting in social isolation and alienation, individuation includes elements of self-transcendence, that is, overcoming self-interest and ego by cultivating empathy, altruism, and dedication to the need of others in meaningful social contexts and relationships. As a political logic, individuation mandates an emphasis on societal conditions for optimal personal development, such as support for life-long education and learning as well as pursuit of diverse and heterogeneous forms and pathways of psychological and spiritual growth, including opportunities for collaboration, collective pursuit of common goals, and mutual support in absence of economic interest and pressure [19, 20, 34]. On the subordinated institutional or organizational level, the political logic of individuation is expressed in the social logic of humanistic management, inherent in notions of self-actualization at work, as opposed to neoliberal employee self-reliance.

4.2 Solidarity

The humanistic antipode to neoliberal logics of market competition, political logics regarding solidarity focus on social relationships and interactions, emphasizing structural support, cohesion and collaboration, shared use of resources, and collective action for the common good [35, 36, 37]. Solidarity is typically directed at those who are in a similar situation as oneself, are facing struggles or adverse conditions, being exploited, marginalized,

discriminated, excluded or otherwise disadvantaged (e.g., poverty, violence, injustice). Practical solidarity is expressed in the Marxian dictum that an ideal society should treat everybody, not according to contributions or possessions, but according to individual needs and abilities. Enacted solidarity requires perspective-taking, insight into common situations and shared interests, rendering it a core component of “class consciousness” [38]. Counteracting social stratification and inequality as inherent polarization tendencies of political-economic governance, institutionally, solidarity means redistribution of resources from social groups disproportionately appropriating and accumulating them, to those who most need them (e.g., strong welfare systems, high taxes on wealth). As a social logic, solidarity orients organizations and workplace practices towards structural participation and communal organizing, e.g., reducing differences in status, pay, and privileges [20, 31, 34]. A positive fantasmatic logic behind solidarity is equality, emphasizing universality of the human condition, relatedness, and connection among all people, and inherent value of prosocial and democratic attitudes and actions. This humanistic vision contrasts with individual self-interest and personal advantage, expressed in neoliberal market fantasies of superiority, leverage and competitive advantage, idealizing imageries of dominating and outperforming others.

4.3 Emancipation

The political logic of the humanistic ideal of emancipation, probably the most comprehensive concept discussed here, incorporates multiple layers of meaning [39, 40, 41]. Emancipation generally refers to liberation or attaining freedom by overcoming exploitative or limiting power-structures and dependence relationships. In classic social critique, this refers to abolishing class rule and coercive wage labor relationships by overturning the one-sided appropriation of the means of production by the ruling elite [38, 42]. Complementing this macro-emancipatory meaning, today mostly abandoned as unrealistic or utopian, the organizational literature has highlighted micro-emancipatory actions through which individuals increase their freedom at work, for instance, by resisting pressure and counteracting control by management or by crafting meaning and opportunities for fulfillment in their work activities [40]. Controversial is, if, or at what point, micro-emancipation, maintains, stabilizes and contributes to, rather than challenges, overcomes or reduces domination and suppression [41]. Political logics of emancipation emphasize freedom and human rights of all, not in the sense of economic liberties, but as relieve from artificial economic necessities, pressures, and crisis (e.g., unconditional income, de-commodification, redistribution). Social logics promoting emancipation in the workplace are oriented toward employee autonomy and participatory influence, self-organization and self-determination, such as semi-autonomous work groups and organizational democracy [43, 44]. This counter-model of humanistic as opposed to neoliberal management was framed as organizing for social transformation versus economic rationalization. Underlying fantasmatic logics contrast humanistic visions of empowerment to realize freedom from oppression and economic necessity with the neoliberal injunction of submission under the rule of the market and capitalist institutions.

5 SOCIAL LOGICS OF THE NEOLIBERAL WORKPLACE

5.1 Self-Reliance

First, on the organizational level, the political logic of individualism from the societal level translates into a social (managerial) logic of employee self-reliance in the neoliberal workplace [1, 8, 45]. According to neoliberal management principles, employment is offered

on a time-restricted basis, contingent on demand and with high skill and performance requirements, but with limited employer obligations or commitments, thus ensuring economic organizational flexibility in utilizing human resources (e.g., labor costs). In a reversal of paternalistic employment strategies, employees are held responsible for “self-managing” their performance, health, learning, and careers, negating earlier notions of employer reliance and organizational support [19, 20, 22]. Exceptions to this social logic of self-reliance are typically restricted to a small group of essential core employees, receiving privileged treatment (e.g., high pay and broad benefits), as long as their performance is indispensable for organizational objectives. A dialectic antipode to a neoliberal ideology of employee self-reliance has been found in the concept of self-actualization at work from humanist psychology. Whereas the former signifies a one-sided shift in risks and responsibilities that effectively threatens and deprives the majority of employees of stable and supportive, meaningful, and developmental work experiences, the latter emphasizes the need to provide working conditions that support autonomy, psychological growth, and social embeddedness, as part of a humanistic approach to management and alternative organization.

5.2 Contests

Second, transmitting or implementing the more abstract political logic of competition from the societal level into actual practices at the institutional level is an applied social logic of tournament situations or contests [1, 7, 8]. In the neoliberal workplace, zero-sum, winner-take-all-type contests are pervasively organized for the competitive performance-based allocation of incentives and benefits to among employees, thus incorporating and capitalizing on a mechanism for perpetual increases of reference standards and outcomes [46]. In particular, tournament-type contests are increasingly used to determine variable pay, promotions and development opportunities or continuous employment, as well as authorization of personalized work tasks and individual working conditions [19, 20, 22]. From a humanistic management perspective, contests based on rivalry and establishing ranks of superiority and inferiority among employees should be replaced with and counteracted by communal forms of organizing based on solidarity, cultivating values of equality, justice and cohesion [37]. From this point of view, the social logic of contests is bound to reinforce a dehumanizing winner-looser mentality, or superior-inferior mindset, drawing on latent fascist themes of meritocracy and social Darwinism inherent in the economic imperative of perpetual competition-based profit generation and capital accumulation.

5.3 Rationalization

Thirdly, the pervasive social logic of economic rationalization characterizing contemporary workplaces can be constructed as an organizational-level manifestation of a political logic of instrumentality at the societal level [1, 8, 27]. Both refer to the relationship between individuals and institutions of power and authority as an asymmetric complex of means and ends, subservience and domination, submission and superiority. Specifically, rationalization refers to quantitative increases in economic efficiency as expressed in some outcome to input ratio (e.g., produced market value and labor costs), as the underlying goal of various management instruments, programs, and interventions [20, 47]. Particularly, the social logic of rationalization is embodied in the concept of high-performance work systems, resulting in continuous increases in productivity and profitability, at least partly driven by (competitive) work intensification and precarious employment practices. Note that, while rationalization targets quantitative increases in economic efficiency and performance, typically implemented top-down by management and at the expense of the health and wellbeing of the working

individuals, the humanistic antipode of social transformation aims at qualitative changes towards organizational participation and democratization and improved working conditions and experiences [17, 19, 47]. In contrast, rationalization is the dictum of treating employees as human resources, striving for their optimal utilization to achieve economic goals.

6 SOCIAL LOGICS OF HUMANISTIC MANAGEMENT

6.1 Self-Actualization

On the organizational level, as a social logic applied to the workplace, the political logic of the humanist idea of individuation was identified as corresponding with the humanistic management concept of self-actualization at work [29, 30, 31]. Organizing for self-actualization involves provision of stable and secure working conditions, designed to support individual and collective self-determination, self-efficacy, and socio-moral development, rather than being determined by economic pressure and power struggles. In addition to individual autonomy and learning, this includes opportunities to cooperatively pursue personally significant and societally beneficial work tasks within participatory frameworks of workplace democracy and social and ecological sustainability [20, 34, 43, 44]. As a manifestation of the political logic of individuation, the normative ideal of self-actualization as a social logic of humanistic management is assumed to facilitate the progressive development and realization of higher-order needs for growth, belonging, prosocial impact, and self-transcendence on the individual level [16, 17]. Accordingly, a corresponding fantasmatic logic of radical humanist consciousness is a developmental orientation towards individual and collective psychological growth and evolution.

6.2 Community

A second social logic of humanistic management, referring to supportive relationships and interactions among employees, is found in the principle of community and collaboration towards the common good, included here as the practical application of a political logic of solidarity and a conceptual antipode to the social logic of competitive contests in the neoliberal workplace [35, 36, 37]. With regard to management practices emphasizing employee-oriented flexibility, sense of community shows in support for personalized and dissimilar but considered and fair treatment according to individual needs and situational requirements, emphasizing win-win strategies and generative resources, such as learning, positive work relationships, and a socio-morally supportive organizational climate [19, 20, 22]. Communal forms of organizing are characterized by egalitarian and participatory structures and decision-making processes, allowing for the integrative balancing of pluralist interests and diverging goals of various stakeholders, such as employees, managers, investors, and customers, towards the genuine common good [34, 48]. Such an approach exposes and negates the progressively hegemonial (unchallenged and unquestioned) unitarist and economic logic of managerialism, counterfactually posing as the embodiment of rationality and orientation toward the common good while advancing particular interests and power structures.

6.3 Transformation

Finally, a conceptual antipode to the third dimension of economic rationalization at the organizational level, the social logic of transformation is not aimed at efficiency-oriented (quantitative) “improvements” of the organizational status-quo, but rather directed towards emancipatory (qualitative) changes at the institutional level and in the workplace more

specifically [39, 40, 41]. Relating to the power of authorities and institutions, social transformation implies a transition towards alternative forms of organizing promoting humanist ideas of self-determination and self-actualization or individuation through autonomy and influence, participation and democratization [32, 33]. That is, transcending conventional approaches to organizational power and control through hierarchies, subtle coercion, manipulation, and subjectification or “governmentality”. In the case of flexible workplace practices, transformative aspects have been discussed in the context of creating employee-oriented personalized organizational structures and processes [19, 20]. As a social logic, transformation recognizes, formulates, and communicates the need for radical social reforms of the institutions of capitalism. The latter, however, are also acknowledged as theoretically and practically impossible within the closed economic ideological framework of neoliberalism.

7 FANTASMATIC LOGICS OF NEOLIBERAL SOCIAL CHARACTER

7.1 Success

Nested within an overarching political logic of individualism, and transported via the associated applied social logic of self-reliance, the self-focused neoliberal fantasmatic logic of success on the psychological level manifests as an individual character orientation towards outstanding achievements and perpetual performance, idealizing excellence and exceptionality, portrayed as necessary for overcoming the odds of the situation, such as the forces of social stratification and market dynamics [8, 11, 12]. Similar ideas have been formulated in the analysis of individualistic ideologies of self-willed wealth and self-willed success [21]. The broader theme has been previously described as a fantasmatic logic of growth and progress [1, 13]. In social character theory, the focus on success and excellence is a core feature of the most recently identified ego-oriented personality type of the neoliberal era [4, 5, 9], the flexible individual without any fixed attributes, deriving value only from its immediate actions and their utility to self and others within economic exchange relationships.

7.2 Superiority

Closely related to the fantasmatic logic of success, idolization of superiority, dominance or supremacy is a direct consequence of a political logic of competition, as implemented in the social logic of perpetual contests and tournament situation [46]. Superiority puts the focus on outperforming and dominating others, cultivating a winner-loser or superior-inferior mentality, where inequality and injustice are legitimized as results of individual differences in motivation, abilities, and efforts [9, 12, 13]. Neoliberal fantasies of superiority thus proliferate acceptance of status differences and social stratification, hierarchical order, and the (ever widening) gap in wealth and power between societal elites and underprivileged or marginalized social groups, also referred to as social dominance orientation [49]. Fantasies of superiority are an important aspect of the competitive marketing-oriented social character of advanced market-based capitalism, initiating the accelerated transition to the neoliberal era.

7.3 Submission

The third fantasmatic logic of submission represents the psychological relationship of the individual with institutions of power and authority, as manifesting from an overarching political logic of human instrumentality and implemented through the applied social logic of economic rationalization in contemporary workplaces [20, 26, 27]. The psychoanalytic term submission is used here with reference to the purported ideal of responding adaptively to

changing situations and market forces, successfully fulfilling social roles and obtaining wealth, status, and recognition by acknowledging, accepting, and succumbing to the order of political-socio-economic institutions, injunctions, and implications of neoliberal capitalism [10, 13, 49]. Psychodynamically, this type of active system justification and stabilization relates to the compliance, conformity, and obedience of the authoritarian social character of earlier stages of the historical development of capitalist societies within oppressive traditional feudal systems and modern dictatorships [4, 5]. In all cases, submission refers to the projection of own vital forces and attribution of omnipotence to a supreme and powerful institutional entity, either as the state or in market form.

8 FANTASMATIC LOGICS OF RADICAL HUMANIST CONSCIOUSNESS

8.1 Evolution

The self-focused dimension of the fantasmatic logic of radical humanism, corresponding with the social logic of self-actualization, as a manifestation of a political logic of individuation, can be expressed as an aspect of personal identity, oriented towards personal evolution, in the sense of organic psychological and spiritual development and growth, learning, maturation, and realization of higher-level consciousness [30, 32, 33]. For instance, an archetypal fantasmatic logic of evolution involves narratives of a personal journey, overcoming adversity, growth, self-insight, and homecoming. These developmental or transcendental imageries differ from performative or functionalistic neoliberal fantasies of success and growth, excellence, and exceptionality, mandated by social logics of self-reliance and “responsibilization” against the “odds of the market”, serving functions of normalizing shifting increased risks and externalized adverse outcomes projected upon individual members of society [9, 21, 22]. In contrast, humanistic fantasies of evolution emphasize the realization of potentialities for full and comprehensive human development in its psychological, physiological, social, and spiritual dimensions [28, 32]. The normative humanist ideal of individual and collective evolution thus contrasts with the fantasmatic neoliberal logic of perpetual quantitative growth and “progress” towards economic criteria or other externally specified objectives.

8.2 Equality

Focusing on interactions and connections with other people, the humanist fantasmatic logic of equality on the individual level was chosen to represent correspondence with political and social logics of solidarity and community on the societal and organizational levels of analysis [35, 36, 37]. More specifically, affirmative attitudes towards equality constitute the psychological foundation of communal forms of organizing and solidarity towards other individuals and social groups. Importantly, equality is based on realizing the universality of human experience, dignity, and interconnectedness of all human being, as well as perspective-taking to promote equal rights and social justice for all [16, 17, 48]. Thus, equality is the psychodynamic antithesis to neoliberal fantasies of superiority and dominance, which serve to legitimize and normalize even the most unreasonable and intolerable degrees and manifestations of political-economic inequality and injustice [13, 49]. Insights into the need for equality, thus, can provide an antidote of humanist consciousness to the distorting and disfiguring dehumanizing psychological effects of economistic thinking.

8.3 Empowerment

The third distinguished component of radical humanist consciousness, the fantasmatic logic of empowerment relates to bottom-up actions directed toward authorities or institutions, aimed at resisting, challenging, and overcoming power structures, oppression, exploitation and inequality [50, 51]. As such, empowerment is conceptualized as the individual-level or psychological prerequisite of a social logic of institutional transformation as a manifestation of a broader political logic of emancipation [39, 40, 41]. Depending on the focus on structural and/or psychological aspects, empowerment can be operationalized in terms of necessary means, knowledge, sense of direction, self-efficacy and intentional efforts towards enacting social reforms and bringing about change. Thus, humanistic fantasies of empowerment are not limited to exceptional accounts of revolutionary mindset, but also comprise everyday actions of civil courage and disobedience, spontaneous moral outrage over unjust conditions, and resistance and refusal to participate in an oppressive and exploitative system [50, 51]. Alongside with an orientation towards personal evolution and equality of all people, empowerment to collectively overcome the limiting status quo, provides a third fantasmatic cornerstone of radical humanist consciousness, suggested as an antipode to the neoliberal social character.

9 EXPLORING MODEL DIALECTICS AND DYNAMICS

The suggested matrix model (2 x 3 x 3) is not devised as static, but intends to offer a dialectic and dynamic framework [52]. Beyond simplifying notions of isolated one-directional cause-and-effect relationships, however, the underlying socio-psychodynamic analysis assumes complementary and dialectic interdependencies, extending and cascading across systems-levels via bi-directional processes of top-down and bottom-up influence, intersecting within individuals as forms of “reciprocal determination” or “elective affinities”, shaping social character structures, affective and behavioral patterns, and states of consciousness [1, 2, 3]. Starting point of this analysis on the societal level is a trinity of neoliberal political logics, prescribing individualism, competition, and instrumentality as the core principles governing advanced Western capitalist societies. For purposes of dialectic analysis, these economic and socio-morally corrosive political logics are antagonistically counterbalanced on the societal level by radical humanist ideas of individuation, solidarity, and emancipation, representing relationships to self, others, and authority [20, 21]. On the organizational level, neoliberal political logics manifest in workplace practices embodying social logics of self-reliance, contests, and rationalization, whereas humanistic management practices emphasize oppositional principles of self-actualization, community, and transformation. These manifested social logics, in turn, mediate or channel the socializing forces of political logics from the societal level towards shaping unconscious (sub- or semi-conscious) psychodynamic imageries and narratives (fantasmatic logics) on the individual level (and vice versa). Based on psychoanalytic theory [2, 4, 5, 9], the latter are exemplified by archetypal neoliberal fantasies of success, superiority, and submission, which can be construed to reflect ego-oriented, marketing-oriented, and authoritarian components in social character theory. These complexes are theoretically opposed to antithetical ideals of humanist consciousness, which incorporates productive orientations towards personal evolution, equality, and empowerment. Dysfunctional tendencies of neoliberalism manifest severely in the sphere of work, notably, in management practices capitalizing on employee self-reliance, instead of job security and benefits, competing for jobs and pay on internal and external labor markets, and subjection to a multitude of interventions, from supervision and performance assessment, motivational trainings, to restructuring and change management. Importantly, these measured are primarily

aimed towards achieving economic objectives (e.g., efficiency, profits, shareholder value, market position) that are not first and foremost benefitting those who are mobilized (i.e., “instrumentalized”) for purposes not in their own best interest [24, 25, 26]. Increasing hegemonic proliferation of a managerial ideology of “unitarism”, notwithstanding, employment is characterized by inherent conflicts of interest on the societal (e.g., labor protection), organizational (e.g., participation), and individual (e.g., personal time) level. While, in theory, humanistic management can introduce additional layers of employee-oriented workplace flexibility, implementation of similar flexible work and employment practices within a neoliberal paradigm can provide a vehicle for economic rationalization and divisive labor-political power tactics [20, 21]. In further steps towards constructing a nomological network of established psychological constructs, economic psychodynamics have been linked to states of social alienation from critical sociology, namely, self-estrangement, normlessness/isolation, and powerlessness. Their positive antipodes were connected to the domains of basic need fulfillment from humanistic social psychology, competence, relatedness, autonomy. Personal meaning was suggested as bipolar meta-dimension (meaninglessness vs. meaningfulness) of existential alienation, respectively, wellbeing. These additional considerations are summarized in the following.

10 CONSTRUCTING A NOMOLOGICAL NETWORK

On the individual level, higher-order political and social logics resurface in semi-, sub- and unconscious fantasies, narratives, and imaginaries, reflecting manifestations of either neoliberal ideologies or humanist ideas [1, 2, 7, 8]. Imagineries of neoliberal logic are exemplified in fantasies of success, excellence and exceptionality, superiority or dominance, and submission or adaptativeness. The rugged individualism of complete self-reliance under uncertainty and competitive conditions demands perpetual success, performance and achievement, demonstrating invincibility against the hardship of the markets, dominating over others by outperforming them in tournament-like winner-looser contests [21, 22, 46]. At the same time, requiring submission under the “supreme rule” of the invisible hand of the economy and market institutions, fulfilling prescribed social roles, seeking status and affiliation [23, 24, 25]. On the other side of the ideological spectrum, humanistic imaginaries tend to emphasize oppositional narratives of evolution and growth, justice and equality, as well as empowerment and revolution [16, 17, 32, 33]. Importantly, these suggested labels are exemplary and preliminary. To strengthen the theoretical foundation of these fantasmatic aspects, relationships have been construed with conceptualizations of: (a) alienation from critical sociology; (b) basic psychological need fulfillment from humanistic social psychology; (c) psychological research on meaning in life and work, converging with aspects of workplace spirituality [7]. These are comprehensive and elaborated concepts, drawing on decades of theorizing and empirical research, and only some cursory notes on the suggested role of these concepts in relation to the ideological matrix model can be offered here.

10.1 Alienation

Alienation is a core concept of social critique, initially conceived as an objective state arising from material societal conditions, i.e., concentrated ownership of means of production and wage labor (the employment system), combined with interest-driven competitive accumulation of capital through extraction of “surplus value” from the labor process [4, 38, 42]. Subsequent research has adopted a subjective redefinition of alienation as a psychological response to adverse working conditions, such as highly repetitive tasks (division of labor) and lack of control or influence at work, converging with depression,

learned helplessness, and occupational burnout [53, 54, 55, 56]. One influential conceptualization distinguishes the dimensions of self-estrangement, normlessness, isolation, powerlessness, and meaninglessness [53, 55]. Self-estrangement refers to a loss of connection with one's "inner self", in the sense of personal congruence, authenticity, and agency, or the loss of a positive identity. Normlessness means lack or loss of shared prosocial norms and values, providing positive interactions and connection to other people. Isolation, feelings of being disconnected, separated and detached from social others, is subsumed here under the dimension of normlessness. Powerlessness captures lack of influence and control, feeling dominated by structural and social coercion and pressures [50, 51]. Meaninglessness, lack of purpose, orientation, and community, is included as a meta-dimension of alienation. While not exhaustive regarding the broader critical notion of alienation, these concepts partly correspond with analyses of the psychological pathology of advanced capitalist societies [4, 5, 6]. On the level of personal inquiry, they provide a starting point and structure to reflect about sources of alienation in one's own life, and how these relate to higher-level political and social logics, often adopted or accepted without questioning, including changes could to live more authentically up to the fulfillment of endorsed humanistic values and ideals.

10.2 Fulfillment

The fulfillment of human needs and development of human potentials are core ideals and aspirational goals of humanistic psychology. Numerous more or less convincing and complete taxonomies of human needs exist. Based on advances in social psychological self-determination theory empirically well-established are basic needs for competence, relatedness, and autonomy [57, 58, 59]. In other words, this refers to experiences of personal self-efficacy and accomplishment; felt acceptance and connection in a social group; and having (some) influence over the environment, specifically, freedom from constraints over choosing and carrying out own, self-determined, intrinsically motivated actions. In decades of research, fulfillment of these needs has been shown to contribute to intrinsic (autonomous) motivation, psychological wellbeing, and functioning in different life domains (e.g., work, sports, health) [57, 59]. In the broader framework of self-determination theory, basic psychological needs theory is embedded into other sub- or mini theories, such as cognitive evaluation theory, organismic integration, and individual causality orientations theory [57]. For the present purpose, the fulfillment of psychological needs for experiencing competence, relatedness, and autonomy (self-efficacy, connection, discretion) is seen as the basis for experiencing meaningfulness [60]. Antipodes to self-, other-, and authority-oriented fantasies of success, superiority, and submission, fulfillment of needs for competence, relatedness, and autonomy are construed as associated with humanistic fantasies of evolution, equality, and empowerment [1, 2, 7, 8]. Thus, these aspects of humanist consciousness are suggested as contraindicated to the corresponding alienating fantasies of the neoliberal social character. Personally, genuine fulfillment of needs for competence, relatedness, and autonomy also provides a practical gauge and approach to structuring and evaluating own experiences, for instance, with regard to work, scholarship, or any other life domain or activity.

10.3 Meaning

Meaning, significance, or sense of purpose, is fundamental to comprehensive wellbeing, psychological functioning, and personality development [60, 61, 62]. Meaning has been defined as comprising sense of coherence (e.g., fit between own values, beliefs and needs and the situation), direction (e.g., ethical norms, moral values, developmental goals and opportunities), significance (e.g., benefitting and helping others, contributing to personal

important causes), and belonging (e.g., felt acceptance and inclusion in a social group), either with regard to life in general or a specific domain, such as employed work [60, 63]. Following self-determination theory, meaning relates to fulfillment of psychological needs for competence, relatedness and autonomy, triggering states of self-efficacy, social connection, and internal locus of control [57, 58, 59]. Meaninglessness, on the other hand, corresponds with dimensions of social alienation, i.e., self-estrangement, normlessness/isolation, and powerlessness [53, 54, 56]. Meaninglessness and -fulness thus reflect bipolar meta-dimensions of alienation, respectively, psychological fulfillment, considering that meaning is a complex experience, assuming mixed, hybrid or paradox forms of “existential involvement” [60, 62]. Personally, attempts to create meaning (e.g., by helping others, contributing to a socially important cause) and efforts to remove (ideological) barriers or obstacles to meaning (e.g., overcoming economistic thinking) thus are complementary strategies for cultivating humanistic consciousness as an emancipatory project.

11 CONCLUSION

The humanist principle of synergistic unity of insights regarding external and internal social realities emphasizes the complementarity of the (externally directed) denaturalization and critique of societal ideologies with (internally directed) critical self-reflection and psychological development. To conclude, the presented analysis intends to contribute to both, that is, clearing the mind and strengthening the soul, based on cultivating radical humanist philosophy to counteract socially corrosive tendencies of neoliberal economistic rationality. An important entrance point, figuratively speaking, a “portal” or “gateway” into the internal or mental ideological matrix, meaning is a central dimension of human experience and can be intuited and consciously reflected. The internal matrix refers to the personal mental (cognitive and affective) representation of the normative structure of concepts and descriptors, suggested here in more abstract and theoretical terms from an academic perspective. Certainly, actual experiences of meaning, fulfillment, and alienation include a fuller range of physical, psychological and spiritual aspects, which can help guiding decisions on how to adopt, enact, and promote humanist ideals on a personal level. Hopefully, the present preliminary elaborations are helpful in initiating and supporting such efforts.

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