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Nebojša Jovanović
Psychologist and Psychotherapist
Founder of the O.L.I. Modality [5]

Aleksandar Stevanović[6]
International doctor school,
Catholic University of Mursia, Spain

# Transformations of the Superego in Contemporary Individuals

## Abstract

This paper examines the changes in the super-ego and the typical pathologies observed in contemporary clients. It traces the evolution from the conflict neuroses of the Victorian era, in which the ego feared a strict and moralistic super-ego, to the narcissistic culture characterized by narcissistic disorders, self-love, and the narcissistic ego ideal. The paper then explores the shift to a perverse culture, where the super-ego is "dismantled," all values and authorities are undermined, and the exploitation of others, as well as the recruitment of others into one's own exploitation, has become normalized. The paper concludes by raising critical questions about the necessary theoretical and technical adjustments required to adapt psychotherapeutic practice to these emerging cultural shifts.

**Keywords:** changes, superego, contemporary man

[5] jnebojsa1@gmail.com

[6] astevanovic@alu.ucam.edu

## 1. Introduction

There is a growing number of authors who recognize and write about the changes in morality, conscience, and the super-ego of modern individuals. The loss of values, the degradation of authority, and the collapse of moral norms are increasingly evident. While early 20th-century authors wrote about the rigid, strict Victorian super-ego that needed to be softened, mid-20th-century thinkers began to describe a narcissistic super-ego (or ego ideal), pointing to narcissism as a dominant social pathology that permeates all spheres of life—love, work, social relations, sports, and art.

Neurotics suffered from guilt, whereas narcissists suffer from "narcissistic injuries," wounded egos, threatened self-worth, and shame (when their grandiose self-image is challenged), as well as a pervasive sense of emptiness. It has been argued that narcissistic culture paved the way for the development of a perverse culture. The narcissism and individualism of the late 20th century, by promoting selfishness, greed, the accumulation of wealth, and exploitation, laid the groundwork for the emergence of a perverse mode of functioning, one characterized by "looking the other way" in the face of various social deviations.

The broader definition of perversity is not necessarily tied to sexuality, but rather to a more general condition of mental and moral corruption. Perverse behavior differs from the self-love or self-interest typical of narcissistic dynamics, which usually remain within the law or, at the very least, recognize its existence and try to operate within its boundaries. Furthermore, (secondary) narcissists still long for love and recognition from others. In contrast, the perverse position uses others in a more detached or autistic (perhaps cold) way. It embodies an exploitative stance, in which others are primarily viewed as accomplices in the pursuit of exploitation.

In a previous article published in this journal, we discussed changes in the ego in modern society, including the concept of the vertical unconscious and the emergence of new defense mechanisms—such as compulsive scrolling, superficiality, diminished capacity for reflection, chronic distraction, the emotionalization of thought processes, and the devaluation of logical reasoning.We recorded complaints from educators, noting that children and adolescents show a declining interest in learning, perceive school as boring, and increasingly seek immediate gratification through games, social networks, and digital content. In place of Victorian morality centered on the repression of sexuality, a new morality is emerging—one of short-term hedonism and, in particular, intellectual passivity and mental laziness (Jovanović, 2024).

Sexuality and aggression are now increasingly less repressed, while under the banner of human rights, the gratification of impulses is openly encouraged. The superego, figuratively speaking, has been "tarred and feathered," and a "new normal" superego is forming, one grounded in an inverted system of values. This new moral framework disdains traditional norms, while the gratification of personal impulses becomes a primary value (modern terminology frames this as self-love or authenticity).

This “new normal” superego also retains a prohibitive function—namely, the prohibition of thought itself. Rather than enforcing moral norms, it introjects stereotyped attitudes toward topics about which one is no longer permitted to think independently. There is a clear agenda and a list of issues within the “brave new world” on which dissenting thought is not tolerated (vaccines, climate change, LGBT rights, diverse sexual identities, migration, faith in science, the theory of evolution…). Everything else—except for tax evasion and breaking the law—is permitted. A brave new superego indeed. What we observe in social institutions, we also see in individuals: politicians are allowed to be immoral, corrupt, and even irrational, as long as they remain aligned with the predetermined agendas of their sponsors. The media is similarly permitted to lie, sensationalize, and manipulate public opinion—as long as it adheres to accepted narratives.

In this paper, we present a historical overview of changes in the superego through the work of other authors, alongside our reflections on how these transformations are mirrored in psychotherapeutic practice and what we, as psychotherapists, can do in response to these challenges.

## 2. Changes in the Understanding of Conscience in Psychoanalytic Thought

### 2.1. Super-Ego as the Product of Fear of Punishment

In *The Ego and the Id* (Freud, 1923), the superego is introduced as one of the three structures of the psyche, alongside the id and the ego, within Freud's second topographical model. In this context, Freud discusses the superego and the ego ideal (the idealized version of the self one aspires to become) as though they were interchangeable. The ego ideal refers to the internalization of an ideal, typically during childhood, toward which the individual strives and against which the actual ego is measured. Another conceptual path that led Freud to the notion of the superego involves individuals' moral behavior. A person's moral compass develops through repeated exposure to norms of what should and should not be done, shaped in interactions with parents, cultural influences, and caregivers. This prolonged exposure leads to the internalization of parental authority—an introjection that ultimately serves as the foundation for the superego.

There are very few works within psychoanalytic literature dedicated to methodology—beginning with Freud himself, where a notable gap exists between writings on method and those on theory—and even fewer that focus specifically on the analysis of the superego. This is a peculiar situation, given that Freud regarded the superego as the primary source of therapeutic change. In *Group Psychology* (1921), for example, he states that the analyst can influence the analysand primarily through their superego. When discussing hypnosis, Freud introduces the idea that the hypnotist, as a loved object, occupies the place of the ego ideal for the hypnotized individual. He links this concept to analysis and the analysand's suggestibility within the transference relationship with the analyst, concluding that the analyst's effectiveness stems from being positioned in the place of the analysand's superego. Thus, the superego plays a crucial role in analytic therapy.

After decades of neglecting what Freud (1933) described as the "desired field of work for psychoanalysis"—namely, "the problems posed by the unconscious sense of guilt, its connections to morality, education, crime, and delinquency..." (p. 61)—in favor of preoccupations with narcissism, shame, the self, relationality, and more recently the neurological foundations of the mind, issues related to the superego, guilt, and conscience now appear to be re-emerging as relevant topics. It seems timely to reconsider psychoanalytic theory on morality. In earlier works (Jovanović, N., 1985; 1988), prompted by Freud's assertion that the key field of psychoanalytic work is on the superego, I explored the idea of psychoanalysis as a form of secondary moral education. "One who has successfully gone through education in self-truthfulness," Freud asserts, "is permanently protected from the dangers of immorality, even if their measure of morality deviates in some way from the commonly accepted societal one." This statement suggests the existence of more universal moral principles that transcend social conventions. Immorality, Freud implies, stems from a lack of self-truthfulness. Knowledge—truth—is healing and leads to transformation in the domain of morality. Freud expresses the aim of therapy as follows: "... the patient should be taught to liberate and fulfill their own nature, not to resemble us." These statements imply that psychoanalysis enables the reconstruction of the superego toward an acceptance of "one's own nature." But this raises the question: what exactly is the nature of the person? Is it inherently dangerous to society and civilization, or is it fundamentally good, merely distorted by societal influence through the introjection of prohibitions into the superego—prohibitions that label this inner nature as

animalistic and threatening? Freud's writings offer seemingly contradictory views on this issue. If the Id is malevolent, if destructive impulses and evil are rooted deep within the psyche, then what is the purpose of exploring those depths? More pointedly, what purpose would be served by "liberating" what is found there? Wouldn't psychoanalysis, in that case, be facilitating the very acting out it claims to mitigate?

Psychoanalysis does not encourage acting out; irresponsibility is the antithesis of freedom. Freedom implies self-control, which is not a matter of unconscious repression, but rather the capacity to think of others and to respect their rights. This understanding of freedom is not antisocial, but it can stand in opposition to forms of society that do not respect each individual's right to autonomy. It is evident that psychoanalysis has a political dimension and implications, a dimension that is often suppressed or diluted through its incorporation into medicine, as argued by R. D. Laing in his books *Social Forgetting* (Jacoby, 1975) and *Repression of Psychoanalysis* (Jacoby, 1983).

Fromm explores the distinction between two concepts that are often used interchangeably in practice: responsibility and duty. The term "duty" is derived from the Latin word "debere," meaning "to owe." When an individual "fulfills a duty," they are essentially paying what they owe to an external authority, such as the state, society, or their parents — the authority that governs them. If the authority is internalized in the form of the super-ego, a duty towards this internalized authority arises. Should an individual fail to fulfill their duty, they are expected to be punished by either the external or internal authority.

On the other hand, the word "*responsibility*" comes from the Latin "*respondere*," meaning "to respond." A person is considered "responsible" when they respond to what is before them — to reality, their needs, or another individual. The capacity to respond is inherent to living beings. "Only a person who is alive can respond, or more accurately, the extent to which a person is alive is the extent to which they are able to respond. To the degree that they are 'dead,' they cannot respond... From this follows the general formulation: freedom contains responsibility, and responsibility contains aliveness." Consequently, an individual with a significantly diminished love for life (a necrophilic individual) is incapable of responding responsibly, despite possibly being able to perform duties. This is because they lack the vitality needed to respond fully to the world around them. As Fromm (1982) notes, "By fulfilling their duty, a person can forsake their own responsibility" (p. 73).

### 2.2. From Fear to Love: The Evolution of Conscience

1. **Hypomanic State** – In this phase, individuals deny feelings of guilt. This state is observable in those who view themselves as "supermen," in amoral individuals who disdain those with scruples, and who are unable to recognize or understand themselves. They reject guilt because it is too overwhelming, persecutory, and threatens the integrity of the ego.

2. **Hypoparanoid State** – Individuals at this stage also deny feelings of guilt but project their negative qualities onto others. For them, guilt becomes something externalized, something they attribute to others rather than acknowledge within themselves.

3. **Authoritarian Conscience** – In this stage, individuals acknowledge their moral conscience, but their super-ego still predominates, often with persecutory tendencies. At this point, they "perform duty" and can experience guilt that compels them to obey the authority of both their internal and external super-ego.

As these states are gradually overcome during the course of analysis (though they never fully disappear), and through the development of self-understanding, a fourth state emerges — a humanistic or depressive conscience:

4. **Humanistic Conscience** – At the core of the "humanistic conscience" lies what Melanie Klein describes as the depressive position, or the depressive elements of conscience. This position is directly tied to the development of object relationships — the capacity for object love. It follows the paranoid-schizoid, persecutory phase in the development of relationships with objects (and the development of the super-ego). Initially, the child holds split perceptions of the "good" and "bad" object, such as the "good" and "bad" breasts. The child does not yet perceive the mother as a whole person, but rather as separate partial objects that both satisfy and frustrate. At this stage, the child does not form a relationship with the mother as a whole but with fragmented representations of the object and themselves. The "good" breast is loved, while the "bad" breast is hated and perceived as a persecutor, with the child projecting their own aggression onto the partial object. By integrating the perceptions of the good and bad objects into a whole object and experiencing the mother as a complete person, the child confronts their ambivalence, aggression toward the beloved object, and feelings of guilt. This confrontation gives rise to the desire for reparation — the wish to correct the damage and injustice done to the object.

From her extensive clinical experience, Melanie Klein (2002) proposed significant revisions to the classical theory of the super-ego. She identified pre-Oedipal fantasies and anxieties related to authority in children under the age of two, leading her to conclude that a primitive form of the super-ego ("archaic" super-ego) was present even in the first year of life, which contradicted Freud's earlier claim that the super-ego develops later in childhood.

Kleinian theorists distinguished between persecutory guilt, which leads to self-torment, and depressive guilt, which, instead of being a fear of oneself (as seen in shame and self-reproach), concerns caring for others and making reparations. Depressive guilt involves repairing harm done to others and restoring the relationship. The timing of the transition from paranoid-schizoid and narcissistic positions to the depressive position and the capacity for concern remains controversial, but it is clear that conscience, as the depressive position of concern for others, emerges much earlier than Freud's concept of the super-ego.

The Kleinian perspective, which emphasizes the development of conscience based on love rather than fear, is now supported by empirical research on the "moral life of babies" (Bloom, 2010), which indicates that moral functioning has pre-Oedipal roots.

As Sagan noted, it has long been challenging to understand how a mental function (the super-ego), formed from aggression turned inward under the threat of castration, and functioning according to Freud's (1930) description as "like a garrison in a conquered city" (p. 123), can

simultaneously be the seat of conscientious care for others (humanistic conscience). For Sagan, while the super-ego may encourage hatred, conscience is rooted in attachment and love.

Individuals who have experienced the fusion of libido and aggression, leading to the development of a depressive–humanistic conscience, are less obedient because they feel less persecuted, but they are troubled by the harm they cause to their internal and external good objects—they feel greater responsibility towards their "loved ones." The humanistic conscience is evidently not antisocial; rather, it is social in a qualitatively new way, representing a step forward in the moral evolution of humans. Psychoanalysis has shown that the differentiation between experiencing oneself and another person, in certain aspects, is an illusion. The way our super-ego relates to the ego—determining our sense of self-respect—also shapes our relationship with others, influencing our respect for them. By siding with the analysand and helping them free themselves from the persecutory elements of their archaic super-ego, the analyst is not opposing society. The analysand does not lose their conscience, but their conscience transforms qualitatively, becoming less motivated by fear and more by "love for their close one," or rather, an object. The ethics of analysis are meant for a society where the "accepted moral" is not dominated by persecutory elements, for a society grounded in a "humanistic conscience." Unfortunately, as seen in the earlier analysis of societal movements towards narcissistic, perverse, and psychotic cultures, where others are increasingly regarded as objects rather than human beings, societal changes seem to be heading in the opposite direction.

Sagan illustrates the distinction between conscience and super-ego by quoting Mark Twain's depiction of "Huck's dilemma": Huck's super-ego demands that the runaway slave Jim be reported to the authorities, while his conscience urges him to protect his friend. While Freud viewed the formation of the super-ego as the result of aggression turned against oneself, the super-ego forms through the internalization of culture. Freud did not fully account for the fact that the culture being internalized was often racist, sexist, moralistic, and so on. Drawing from Lifton's (1986) work on Nazi doctors, Sagan emphasizes that they were mostly not psychopaths but rather misguided idealists; they did their jobs, as Sagan would put it, "under the flag of the super-ego," just as those working in the "killing fields" with the Khmer Rouge, or most terrorists, did. As Carveth (2010) argued, psychoanalysts have been overly inclined to trace human destructiveness to the id—the so-called "beast" within humans—while grossly overlooking its roots in the unique human super-ego.

### 2.3. What to do with a sharp Super-ego of a client?

*Should it be demolished and its functions transferred to the Ego?*

Some authors have drawn attention to difficulties inherent in the functioning of the superego. Freud, for instance, regarded transformations within the superego as a central focus of psychoanalytic work with patients. The radical proposition that the primary objective of analytic therapy is the complete "demolition" of the superego—its functions subsequently assumed by the ego—was put forward by Alexander (Alexander, 1925). In advancing this view, Alexander concentrates on the unconscious dimension of the superego, which he characterizes as primitive, temporally and realistically disjointed, maladaptive, and automatic in its functioning.

*Should it be modified, help it mature? Establish morality in thinking?*

*"Where the Superego was, let there be Ego"?*

Two years later, Ferenczi (1927) concurred with this view: "Only a complete breakdown of the superego can lead to radical healing" (p. 100). However, by conflating the superego with conscience, most psychoanalysts feared that eliminating the former would also destroy the latter, potentially fostering psychopathy. Consequently, they advocated for the modification and maturation of the superego rather than its elimination and replacement with conscience.

In opposition to the immoral moralism of the superego, Alexander and Ferenczi—as well as Bion later (1962)—sought to establish genuine morality through thinking. Conscience was understood as a rational function of the ego, in which the individual considers the consequences of their actions for both themselves and others. This could be encapsulated in a reformulation of the Freudian dictum: "Where the superego was, let there be ego."

*Replace it or supplement it with moral sentiment – Conscience from feeling.*

Unlike such rationalism, Sagan recognizes that conscience does not arise from reason but from feeling, from what Jean-Jacques Rousseau (1774) calls "pity"—sympathy or empathy.

Racker (1966), in his article on the origins of ethics, observes that Freud's findings regarding the origin of the superego in fear correspond to a series of observable facts, yet he questions whether that is the full explanation. He proposes that there exists a natural capacity to distinguish between good and evil from the very beginning—though not in an ethical sense, and especially not in relation to others. This capacity pertains to the ego and initially involves the ability to differentiate between pleasure and displeasure. Pleasure, or that which causes it, is experienced as the original "good," while displeasure is experienced as "bad." This primary distinction later plays a crucial role in discerning what is good or bad for another person, once love for an object has been established. This principle is reflected in the ethical maxims "Do not do to others what you would not want done to you" and "Love your neighbor as yourself."

Racker continues his analysis by stating that the issue is not whether there exists a natural capacity for distinguishing good from evil, but how the individual (the child) begins to apply this capacity for discrimination to their objects. At this point, we encounter the "external influence" Freud refers to as the "fear of losing love," which arises from the child's dependence on adults. Psychoanalytic research has identified various stages in the development of a child's morality.

*In the first stage* of development, the infant is entirely preoccupied with its own needs and experiences good and evil through responses to satisfaction and dissatisfaction (Klein, 1937). Satisfaction evokes "primary love" for the "good object" that provides it, while dissatisfaction elicits hatred and anger toward the "bad object" that causes it. At this stage, the moral problem does not yet exist. The good object is loved, and the bad object is hated. These are experienced as distinct, and there is no dilemma involving an ambivalent relationship toward a whole object that is simultaneously good and bad—both satisfying and frustrating.

That which produces satisfaction in the infant—such as food, care, and closeness—originates from the love expressed by the mother and is perceived and experienced by the child, eliciting a loving response. This response becomes associated with the feeling of "goodness." "This love makes the child feel connected to its objects and leads to identification with them—its close ones, human beings. By combining these two processes—the internal capacity for

distinguishing between satisfaction and suffering (and thus between what causes each), and the knowledge (both internal and experiential) that love and identification with others are 'good'—it becomes evident that human beings originally possess a sense of what is good or bad for their fellow beings. Naturally, I am referring here to what is fundamental and elemental ('from the beginning'), without ignoring the many ethical dilemmas that inevitably arise from the complexity of life" (Racker, 1966).

*In the second stage*, the dominance of needs persists, but the mother who provides satisfaction (the "good object") and the mother who frustrates (the "bad object") are increasingly perceived as one integrated entity. At this point, the dilemma emphasized by Freud arises for the child: aggression directed toward the object may result in the loss of love, punishment, revenge, or the fantasy destruction of the desired object.

The moral issue only authentically and realistically emerges in the third stage, when there is sufficient love and identification between the ego and the object. Freud's final conceptualization of the superego aligns with these findings. Through his research, Freud discovered that the superego is not merely an extension of external authority internalized by the child, but that its formation, particularly its aggressiveness, also depends on the aggression the child directs toward its objects.

According to Freud, this aggression is primarily repressed due to external prohibitions. In order to avoid directing aggression toward the object, the child turns it inward. Consequently, the harshness of the superego arises not only from parental strictness but also from the child's internalized aggression turned against itself. The severity of the superego results from two influences: the instinctual frustrations that release aggression, and the experiences with objects that lead the child to internalize its aggression, transforming it into the superego.

Thus, self-love provides the foundation for the subsequent understanding of what is good or evil for others. These moral foundations are not externally imposed but rather emerge universally, forming the basis for ethical judgments across all cultures. Self-love, at the core of morality, is critical. A person loves themselves when the ego has developed positive "interpersonal relationships" with its internalized objects that constitute the superego. Therefore, the relationship with others is a projection of the relationships within the inner "political stage" of the personality. Racker posits that this very identification of "I" with "You" represents the foundational structure of ethics and morality.

## 3. The New Normal Superego

*Has there been a deconstruction of the superego or significant changes in its organization?*

While psychoanalysts debated whether the superego should be dismantled, transformed, or developed into self-love as the foundation of conscience, such that it might, through love for others, evolve into mature morality, culture was simultaneously undergoing evolution, effecting changes in the superego that are observable today in many individuals. What, then, is this new "postmodern superego"?

### 3.1. The Postmodern Superego

The concept of the postmodern superego was introduced by Slavoj Žižek (1999) to highlight the transformations he observed in the moral behavior of Western societies at the turn of the new millennium.

Postmodernism is characterized by a skeptical and nihilistic attitude toward universal concepts such as truth, reality, and knowledge (Bauman, 1998). In essence, postmodernists tend toward self-referentiality, pluralism, and a disregard for traditional norms.

George Frankl (2001), in *Foundations of Morality*, identifies a series of predominantly negative behaviors and attitudes that characterize the postmodern subject within this social and cultural context. Frankl emphasizes the rise of tendencies such as unlimited greed—defined as an "oral-cannibalistic drive" (p. 13)—the predominance of selfishness, and the liberation of sadistic-destructive impulses. According to Frankl, this new morality emerges as a result of the colossal failure of traditional values during the twentieth century, as evidenced by numerous wars, increased poverty, unemployment, prejudice, oppression, and the establishment of extermination camps.

Frankl (2001) asserts, "We cannot trust our judgments or even our perceptions because we cannot trust the concepts of our civilization that have determined our judgments" (p. 7).

These twentieth-century events led to a wave of disillusionment that severed the bond between individuals and authority. The authorities in question here are not only governors and law enforcement officials but also gods, parents, teachers, and anyone holding power over us. This relationship, once marked by respect, fear, and admiration, is now characterized by anger, skepticism, mistrust, and uncertainty. This shift is fundamentally tied to the superego, which is why Frankl (2001) claims to witness the "murder of the superego" (p. 29).

Similarly, Žižek (1999) describes the postmodern subject as increasingly narcissistic, preoccupied with freedom, self-fulfillment, and enjoyment. While Frankl focuses more on the problem of the unfiltered liberation of instinctual impulses, Žižek emphasizes the postmodern cultural ideology that underpins these impulses. Both authors agree that there has been a reversal of traditional values and parental authority in favor of freedom and liberation. However, the central question remains: What is this freedom, and does it entail responsibility?

This rejection of authority and tradition in favor of a personal and subjective moral code, subject to change from one situation to another, is characteristic of postmodern thought. It has created a climate of moral uncertainty in which every value, rule, and moral code is constantly

questioned and doubted. The motivations for behavior that guided individuals in earlier times have been discarded in favor of a generalized nihilistic disbelief in the values proclaimed by the Enlightenment.

Old values have been dismantled, as has the superego that was built upon them. But what remains? Has something new been constructed—new values, new meaning, new purpose? The question also arises: Has only the superego rooted in fear been demolished, or has the conscience, originating in love, been destroyed as well? Has love been eradicated?

*Has the Superego been replaced by a narcissistic Ego Ideal? Or has the content of the Superego been replaced with opposing values? Between narcissistic and perverse cultures.*

Since tradition can no longer be relied upon, everything becomes a matter of individual choice, and mental life is dominated by an excess of possibilities. This reality encapsulates the contemporary phenomenon of "reflexivity" (Žižek, 1999), where every impulse is subject to choice, and everything becomes open to debate. The so-called "new normal" arises as a product of the "hypernormalization" of what was once considered a deviation from normality. However, this raises the question: Why the rise in anxiety among individuals if they are no longer threatened by a rigid moralistic superego?

Jesus (2023) suggests that as the superego weakens, the ego ideal may grow stronger, leading individuals to experience shame rather than guilt. Furthermore, considering that the ego ideal has historically been linked to narcissism (Freud, 1991; Rosenfeld, 1952), and given that postmodern society is described as predominantly narcissistic, it could be posited that the ego ideal has taken control of the psyche at the expense of the superego. This hypothesis may provide an explanation for the persistence of anxiety, even though the connection to external authority has been fractured.

If we accept the emphasis placed by postmodernism on individualism, freedom, and its dismantling of moral institutions, it becomes clearer why individuals might feel a lack of moral compass. The freedom to make personal choices only heightens uncertainty and complicates decision-making, especially when compared to the relative simplicity of following tradition or religious texts, which preordain life's goals and the means to achieve them.

If the superego has been destroyed, one would expect the disappearance of guilt. The experience of remorse arises with the depressive position as a response to harmful attacks or fantasies about such attacks on a parental figure. The intensity of guilt serves as a useful indicator of the dominance of the superego, often reflecting the extent of repressed aggression. When guilt is experienced, feelings of love and admiration surpass anger and resentment, prompting the individual to seek reparations for previous sadistic attacks. However, Frankl postulates that when the bond of love with authority is severed, remorse does not arise, and anger is more freely expressed. He suggests that this scenario illustrates the current state of Western civilization, where individuals no longer experience guilt or experience it to a significantly lesser degree than before the twentieth century.

The absence of guilt does not necessarily imply that the superego has been entirely destroyed. If we consider Melanie Klein's concept of the dual superego, in which good and bad are split through the mechanism of splitting, the absence of guilt may indicate the presence of a primitive

and sadistic superego that has not yet reached the depressive position of integrating good and bad objects and the need for reparation. Alternatively, it could signify a collective regression to the paranoid-schizoid position.

Indeed, Frankl's description of current behaviors, in the context of what he considers an absent superego, appears to correspond with behaviors associated with a pathological superego, as described by Bion (1967), or a primitive Kleinian superego. Assuming the superego is formed when the first bad object is introjected, could it still be considered a superego if the sadistic phase never ended and the individual remained incapable of remorse? If the superego never developed beyond the introjection of bad objects, would this entity—constituted solely by bad objects, fostering fear and retribution—still be classified as an archaic superego? Could such a partial, distorted construct serve as the source of any mature conscience? To recall the stages of moral development outlined by Money-Kyrle (1952): from the hypomanic, through the hypoparanoid and authoritarian stages, to the humanistic conscience, with the first three stages characterized by guilt and fear, while the final stage is based on love for the object and the need for reparation (the depressive position). What is the persecutory aspect of the new (and yet archaic) superego? What are its demands?

According to Žižek, the postmodern superego has introduced a specific and unique obligation—the obligation to be free and to enjoy life. This mandate, reminiscent of a direct command from the id, generates "new guilt and anxieties instead of opening a brave new world where we can enjoy reshaping and transforming our multiple identities" (Žižek, 1999).

"Be careful what you wish for; it might come true," as the popular saying goes. When and how, as in the story of Dr. Faust, who made a pact with the devil and sold his soul to be freed from all limitations, will the devil "come to collect"? The liberation of instincts brought by postmodernity appears to be free from constraints only at first glance. In Žižek's article in the *London Review of Books* titled “You Can!” (1999), the author argues that in a society overwhelmed by permissiveness, there are no "strong prohibitions." However, it is impossible to escape the overwhelming freedom it conveys. Thus, "You can!" becomes an imperative, transforming into "You must." There is a call for unlimited transgression with a promise of suspended judgment. Yet, if individuals are encouraged to maximize pleasure and enjoy life to the fullest, failing to do so—whether by not enjoying enough or by being unable to enjoy—results in guilt for failing to be happy and successful, as dictated by the new age. Even if culture no longer imposes obligations, postmodern individuals now impose them on themselves, feeling compelled to enjoy because they are the ones who "choose" to fulfill these demands. Postmodern society, then, is falsely permissive, filled with regulations and impositions under the guise of ensuring happiness. Rather than experiencing guilt for wrongdoing or harm caused to another human being, modern individuals are more likely to feel guilty for indulging in something sweet while on a diet, skipping the gym (narcissistic dictates of physical appearance), or failing to present an attractive Instagram post to showcase the quality of their lives.

Patrick McGinnis (2004) conceptualized the new anxieties of the digital age: FOMO and FOBO. FOMO (Fear of Missing Out) refers to the anxiety of missing out on experiences, information, or social interactions. It reflects a fear of being disconnected from the digital world, feeling excluded from significant events, or missing opportunities for social engagement. In addition,

FOMO manifests as anxiety over failing to make the "right" choices in a context where every experience is expected to be fully realized. This fear extends to many areas of life, as illustrated by clients' concerns about missing out on life's possibilities, falling behind in achievements, or being inefficient in their pursuit of success. FOMO is often closely tied to FOBO (Fear of Better Options), which is the anxiety about committing to a decision because a better option might emerge later. Whether it's choosing a partner or a job, FOBO stems from the belief that every decision offers something but also takes something away. What if I pick one partner and later meet someone more compatible? What if I accept one job only to encounter a better one later? FOBO induces feelings of anxiety, frustration, stress, and dissatisfaction, primarily due to the overwhelming freedom of choice. This becomes a significant challenge for the postmodern individual, who lacks stable criteria for decision-making. In their postmodern Faustian quest for omnipotence, aspiring to transcend all limitations, they struggle with the inherent sacrifices life demands—accepting that some opportunities must be foregone in favor of others, such as when choosing parenthood over career advancement or leisure.

The new-normal superego, emerging in this context, is liberal with respect to many ethical norms but paradoxically becomes rigid, dogmatic, and even dictatorial on select issues. One might ask: To what master and for what purpose does such a superego serve? Perhaps recent works offer clues to this question.

Lieberman (2019) aligns with Frankl's portrayal of postmodern society, offering an analysis in her book *An Analysis of the 'New Super-Ego' – Greed and Envy in the Recent Era of Wealth*. In her work, Lieberman—a seasoned clinical psychoanalyst—was motivated to explore the concept of the "new super-ego" after noticing an increasing number of her patients' concerns connected to this phenomenon, which she attributes to contemporary cultural shifts. She observes a rising prevalence of symptoms such as guilt, anxiety, extreme boredom, "psychic emptiness," helplessness, and despair, which have become emblematic of the modern psyche.

Lieberman attributes these developments to the aftermath of the horrific wars of the twentieth century—an era marked by unprecedented levels of death during conflicts—as well as to the transformative technological advancements that have revolutionized the way people learn, spend their time, think, and communicate. This society is infused with a spirit of change and revolution, which, she argues, challenges the traditional superego. The superego, a custodian of tradition, fear, hatred, love, guilt, aggression, and obedience, finds itself at odds with a new social order that rejects the authorities and values of the past. The tension between this ancient entity—the superego—and a society that seeks to dismantle all traditional values exemplifies one of the characteristics of the perverse mind. Could this revolutionary stance—seeking freedom through the elimination of the moralizing superego—be the path to a new world?

Lieberman examines how shifts in societal values and behavioral norms have influenced what analysts now observe in their clinical practice. Drawing on clinical data, she highlights the psychological foundation of values that are promoted by current political and societal trends. She explores what she terms the "new super-ego" in a society where deceit is rampant, often unpunished, where greed and envy seem to be on the rise, and where there is an increasing focus on the body and physical appearance. Traditional gender roles have been challenged, yet they have given way to confusion and chaos. Relationships are formed and maintained through technology, but many individuals feel increasingly lonely and empty. She reflects on the changes in her patients over the years, noting, "I have seen tremendous changes in the psyche

of those who come for treatment today compared to those who came 40 years ago. The patients I see today in psychoanalysis and psychoanalytic therapy largely present with diminished ego resilience and different values and morals."

The "new super-ego," Lieberman argues, is rooted in a narcissistic morality: for many in contemporary culture, achieving high ideals—or even "goodness"—has come to mean physical fitness, exercise, and diet. The pursuit of wealth also plays a central role. This shift is not necessarily driven by altruism, kindness, or behaviors traditionally regarded as "moral." Lieberman connects these changes to broader societal and cultural transformations, particularly the increasing tolerance for lying and deceit, which has, in many ways, become normalized and expected. Corruption, too, is often seen as something that cannot be avoided. People's reactions vary, ranging from anger to moral indignation, often choosing to "turn a blind eye" as a coping mechanism for disappointment and disgust. The widespread distrust in authority, the erosion of values, and growing uncertainty around employment have created significant obstacles for young people in achieving independence.

"Among therapists, there is a growing perception that many young people today feel 'entitled' to the material possessions and earnings of their parents. Consequently, guiding young individuals through the processes of separation and individuation has become increasingly complex. Forty years ago, it was expected that children would achieve independence by the age of 21, supporting themselves and eventually starting families. Today, however, this is no longer the case. Parents of adult children—grandparents included—find themselves caught between their desire to maintain close relationships with their children for societal reasons, to preserve their youth, or to act as a buffer in unhealthy marriages, and the growing cultural norm where parents (and even grandparents) often provide financial support for their children's housing, vacations, and even psychotherapy. This tendency to 'hold on' to their children is in direct conflict with more rational desires to see them achieve adult independence." (Lieberman, 2017, p. 227–228)

These conditions suggest a form of cultural corruption, where youth are increasingly not expected to achieve full independence and are allowed to remain in a "parasitic" state. At the same time, there is a noticeable conflict: an increasing dependence on parents coupled with an emerging disrespect towards them. Many young people feel that parents are obligated to provide for them, yet do not deserve respect in return. This dissonance is further exacerbated by the growing trend among older generations to idealize youth. In a society where wisdom and respect are no longer associated with aging, but rather with weakness, the gap between generations widens. Young people increasingly feel that they have little of value to learn from older generations. As a result, middle-aged individuals strive to maintain youthful appearances for as long as possible. Technological advancements in body and skin modification—such as face-lifts and tummy tucks—have blurred the physical distinctions between young and old. The focus on physical appearance, exercise, and maintaining a thin body has transformed the nature of guilt. Rather than feeling guilty for harming another person, modern expressions of guilt are more likely to stem from indulgences like eating a cookie or skipping a gym session. The phrases "You are what you eat" and "You are where you eat" (with restaurants now being status symbols among the wealthy) reflect how identity has come to be defined by consumption.

Lieberman's book, published in 2019, does not consider global events that unfolded after its release, such as the Covid-19 pandemic, lockdowns, or related behavioral shifts. It also omits

the recent conflicts in Ukraine and Gaza, the escalating geopolitical tensions, and the mounting fears of nuclear catastrophe. The collapse in the credibility of international institutions like the UN and WHO, as well as the increasing sense of impending apocalypse or a "New World Order" meant to restore global control, has led many to question what the future holds. Issues once dismissed as "conspiracy theories" are now openly discussed by political leaders, international officials, and intelligence agencies alike, including heads of state such as Vladimir Putin. This raises a critical question: Who benefits from these profound changes in the ego and superego of the global population, and what are their ultimate objectives?"

In his 2023 text, Jesus analyzes human behavior during the COVID-19 pandemic to question whether people today are less obedient to authority. He views the pandemic as a unique test of obedience, both on a community and global scale, raising the possibility that Milgram's (1974) obedience study might yield different results today, showing decreased compliance. He questions whether individuals have become more resistant to authority and whether this reflects a broader trend of increasing disobedience, cynicism, and perceived freedom. Has the postmodern Western individual shaped an autonomous "orphan superego" without parental authority? Do individuals now act according to Lipovetsky's (1992) "principle of sovereignty," where concern for justice and solidarity is a personal conviction rather than submission to authority?

In *The Twilight of Duty* (1992), Lipovetsky identifies a collective concern for morality, solidarity, and justice in hypermodern societies, where people fight for ethical causes in a genuine demonstration of generosity. This behavior, he argues, contrasts with cultures marked by selfishness and egocentrism. Hypermodern societies often prioritize issues such as human rights, social minorities, and climate change. However, Lipovetsky also claims that even the defense of minority rights, such as those of transgender individuals and the LGBTQ+ community, increasingly adopts "rigid, dogmatic strategies," which resemble a form of ideological dictatorship.

This raises the question: Is the "principle of sovereignty" — concern for justice and solidarity — merely a façade for the introjection of a globalist agenda, instilled through continuous neo-Marxist propaganda? According to this view, the vanguard of this agenda is no longer the working class, but rather minorities — anyone who feels discriminated against. Could what Lipovetsky describes as an ethical shift actually be the rise of WOKE ideology? WOKE has gained significant traction in the West, leading to both supporters and critics. It emphasizes individualism, focusing on personal identity, adaptability, and introspection, and is particularly popular among young people. The term "woke," originally emerging in the 20th-century civil rights movements, was revived in 2014 during the Ferguson riots in the U.S. following the police killing of an African American man. These protests were led by the precursors of the Black Lives Matter movement, which some critics consider controversial or even extremist.

Some argue that WOKE culture is not a subculture or counterculture, but rather an integral component of the dominant culture, supported by globalist elites in the U.S., Canada, the UK, the Netherlands, and Scandinavia. WOKE culture promotes social and political awareness, particularly in combating racism, sexism, and other forms of discrimination. However, the original principles of WOKE have expanded, with "social justice warriors" increasingly fighting against a broad array of issues, which has transformed it into an anti-traditional movement. In

this sense, WOKE could be seen as a rejection of old, traditional values and social relations — potentially amounting to the demolition of the superego itself.

The WOKE movement critiques dominant cultural forces and group identities, invoking moral absolutism, intolerance, and narcissism, while glorifying victimhood and replacing traditional values with opposing ones. If WOKEism is truly a fight for minorities, why does it rely on "cancel culture," a harsh stance against traditional orders and identities, and efforts to silence all opposing views?

Studies on collective obedience are rare, but when discussing obedience during the pandemic, one might ask: does this reflect blind obedience to unreasonable measures during an artificially induced pandemic aimed at training the global population to accept a globalist agenda? Many "conspiracy theorists" (including scientists among them) argue that the pandemic measures were designed to restrict fundamental human freedoms under the guise of "medical measures." Alternatively, as Lipovetsky suggests, the pandemic response could be seen as a reflection of "concern for solidarity and justice." If COVID-19 measures were viewed as a moral duty to society — a moral obligation to do good and act ethically — individuals may have supported these measures as an expression of their personal sovereignty, adopting government directives as their personal beliefs. This would allow individuals to submit to authority without directly acknowledging it, thus maintaining their individualism. While this dynamic existed even before the postmodern era, the increased freedom to express opinions and rebel now pressures individuals to act based on personal beliefs, rather than merely following rules.

Debates on social media highlighted a sharp division, even hostility, between two opposing groups — "vaxxers" and "anti-vaxxers" (often labeled "conspiracy theorists"). "Vaxxers" viewed themselves as responsible citizens and criticized anti-vaxxers as "psychopaths" endangering public health. In contrast, anti-vaxxers saw vaxxers as "useful idiots" blindly trusting science, with some believing that the vaccinated were enabling a global enslavement. They considered themselves "enlightened" — the ones who saw through the global conspiracy. Without considering these opposing views, it is difficult to draw conclusions about the true nature of observed behaviors. Does non-compliance with pandemic measures indicate a new form of disobedience or an alternative form of obedience, depending on whether people view the measures as deceptive? Jesus assumes that the pandemic measures were medically justified and analyzes global human behavior with that perspective.

Jesus raises the question: is postmodern Western society still suffering from overwhelming impositions under the assumption of submission to authority? During the pandemic, health authorities issued guidelines, which governments around the world turned into laws and mandatory dictates. Individuals were required to stay home during lockdowns, and those caught outside without permission faced penalties. Events and public gatherings were banned; face masks had to be worn in public places and on transportation (even pregnant women were forced to wear masks while giving birth). Regular disinfection of hands and surfaces became mandatory; people were required to maintain a 2-meter distance from others; schools and workplaces closed; international borders were largely shut, preventing non-residents from traveling; and during special holidays like Christmas, New Year's, and Easter, domestic travel was prohibited, preventing many from visiting family and friends. The specific restrictions varied by country, but they were widespread.

Was all of this necessary to fight the pandemic, or were these measures an experiment by certain centers of power to gauge global obedience, serving as a model for future global dictatorship? Jesus assumes that these measures were medically justified, based on scientific evidence to combat a global health threat. From this perspective, he analyzes the behavior of the masses.

There is no doubt, he argues, that these restrictions placed a significant strain on people's mental health, leading to social isolation, disrupted work and family routines, economic instability, increased social anxiety, germophobia, and more sedentary lifestyles. Besides being a burden with numerous consequences, some directives issued by European governments revealed inconsistencies and contradictions that could have fostered distrust, potentially sparking revolts and disobedience. For instance, the value of wearing masks for the general population was debated. The pandemic response and adherence to isolation rules varied significantly across the Western world. While some countries demonstrated high compliance, others largely disregarded at least some of the measures intended to curb the spread of SARS-CoV-2. Opinions on how the pandemic was managed and whether enforcing measures was necessary were deeply divided, splitting society into two opposing camps. This division made it difficult to analyze the situation as a whole and reach a solid conclusion about our current state of obedience to authority. Nevertheless, both scenarios — compliance and non-compliance — can be analyzed to better understand the state of the postmodern super-ego.

### 3.2. Non-Compliance scenario

At the same time, it seems that the struggle against authority gave individuals a significant sense of power, symbolizing the end of Freudian helplessness from childhood and, consequently, independence from the need for the super-ego. The postmodern super-ego, in this context, is an attempt to dismantle the super-ego. The current widespread disbelief in God only intensifies this mass feeling. Those chosen to protect society have become a threat by abusing their power—a power that we, in fact, granted them, making us feel guilty and unworthy of trust. As a result, the disappointment directed at the abusive father figure transforms into self-disappointment and a deep distrust in justice and the social systems that produced this disorder. The disobedience shown by these protesters is all the more significant, especially given that, in the context of the pandemic, it risked labeling them as conspirators (“conspiracy theorists,” “anti-vaxxers”), selfish individuals, or even exposing them to the risk of contamination with SARS-CoV-2. Depending on the country, they also faced the potential for fines or criminal charges if caught disobeying. As Erich Fromm puts it, "to be disobedient, one must have the courage to be alone, to err, and to be a sinner." In some countries, such as France, this protest movement gained more traction and was taken more seriously than in others, where it was quickly dismissed and labeled as the work of conspiracy theorists, pandemic deniers, or individuals holding pseudoscientific beliefs. This raises a hypothetical question: what if this truly was a conspiracy against humanity? Could the disobedient protesters then be seen as individuals with a strong conscience, risking much for the common good? Can we even consider such an idea, especially when this group of disobedients included many respected scientists, doctors, and individuals with reputations and integrity?

### 3.3. Compliance Scenario and the Regressive Super-Ego

In countries like Portugal, the high level of compliance suggests that the postmodern super-ego may have regressed into the traditional and Freudian super-ego, better equipped to handle

emergencies, such as the mortal threat posed by the pandemic. As long as individuals follow the rules, they feel safe and protected. The mere suggestion of illness and death is enough to evoke a religious-like zeal and devotion to those who offer protection from harm, restoring the broken connection with authority and forgiving past transgressions. In 2021, despite the widespread belief that over two-thirds of politicians were corrupt and that corruption had increased during the pandemic, Portugal's compliance with government directives was remarkably high. This suggests that struggles for democracy and anti-systemic views are often reserved for times of peace and stability. In times of crisis, under intense pressure, the postmodern super-ego's inclination toward liberation, freedom, and pleasure can become seriously repressed, as Freud (1920) predicted, when he argued that all drives are conservative and tend to retreat to a known, previous state.

In countries where respect for authority prevailed, the authority exercised by government leaders was seen as what Fromm describes as "rational authority" (Fromm, 1984, p. 20), which is exercised in the name of reason and, therefore, is deemed indisputable. In contrast, irrational authority operates through force and suggestion. Of the two, rational authority is more dangerous, as it does not compel obedience directly; instead, individuals are under the illusion that they are acting voluntarily, following only what seems reasonable. As Fromm (1984, p. 47) wisely asks, "Who can disobey the 'reasonable' ones? Who can disobey when they are not even aware they are submitting?"

Jesus concludes that the postmodern super-ego is a fragile structure that can regress to earlier states when necessary or under serious threat. However, he also presents another possibility: the adherence to COVID rules could actually support the idea of the postmodern super-ego, rather than indicate a regression. As Lipovetsky noted, hypermodern societies have developed a concern for solidarity and justice. Therefore, if the COVID measures were seen as a duty to society—an obligation to do good and act ethically—the individuals enforcing them could be supporting their individual sovereignty by adopting government directives as their own personal beliefs. This could be understood as a way of submitting to authority without fully acknowledging it, thus preserving their sense of individualism. Of course, individuals could adopt rules as personal beliefs even before the postmodern era; however, with the increased freedom to express opinions, rebel, and disobey today, individuals are more likely to act based on their personal beliefs, rather than simply following the rules.

Such a conclusion implies that the authority, in the case of the pandemic, is rational—that it does not exploit the crisis for personal gain, infringe upon human rights, or enforce a "medical dictatorship." It suggests that all warnings and opinions asserting otherwise are "conspiracy theories," spread by individuals infected with the "postmodern super-ego" who irrationally seek to overthrow authority, even at great personal cost and despite the potential danger to public safety. The idea that a regression to the old "Freudian super-ego" is beneficial in dangerous situations suggests that such a regression is, in fact, a good solution.

Risking the label of "conspiracy theorist," one might ask—purely for the sake of scientific doubt and the allowance of alternative perspectives—whether the authority involved in the pandemic measures is increasingly malevolent. Does the total control of media narratives and the suppression of expert debate introduce new introjects into people's super-egos, demanding absolute obedience? The super-ego that says: "You can do whatever you want—be promiscuous, selfish, narcissistic, reject all moral norms, values, and even God... And it's fine

to be like that. Everything is allowed, except for thinking differently and challenging my agenda to rule the world." It seems that Jesus does not, at least hypothetically, consider this alternative.

In the previous chapter, it was noted that the function of the super-ego, which traditionally censored the impulses of the ID, has been suppressed or at least modified in the postmodern era. The liberation of ID instincts, particularly the release of aggression toward paternal authority, is evident. Liberman (2019) observed how parents lose authority over their children, while children, in turn, impose their will upon their parents. If the super-ego once served to suppress the Oedipus conflict and preserve the bond with the threatening father, it now seems no longer capable of fulfilling that role. During the protests against COVID-19 in France, the attitude toward the figure of the father (equated here with the government) ceases to be "ambiguous" and instead becomes charged with aggression and disappointment. This phenomenon is partially driven by events of the twentieth century, as Frankl (2001) claims, and fueled by postmodern culture and ideology.

The ideals defended by postmodern individuals are fundamentally at odds with the authorities and hierarchies that perpetuate social inequalities and abuse power. In today's postmodern context, values like subjectivity, individualism, and liberation have become social imperatives that must be upheld at any cost. Since these ideals often conflict with the authority that can restrict them, it's natural for tensions to arise. The government is seen as the oppressor, the enforcer of rigid rules, and the one who limits individual freedom. Authoritarianism, in this sense, symbolizes everything that postmodern individuals seek to dismantle. This shift in power, seen in various protests, leads to the rejection of laws crafted by the same authority. The belief in temporarily suspending the law creates space for the expression of aggressive and instinctual drives, bordering on anarchy, as evidenced by the violence and riots during the pandemic (Wood et al., 2022). The intensity of these drives is directly linked to the anger directed at authority.

Anger toward the "father" figure is nothing new; it is as old as the concept of the family itself (Frankl, 2001). What is new, however, is the unprecedented freedom to express that anger. Postmodern culture not only permits the satisfaction of desires but encourages a direct confrontation with more powerful figures. The disinhibition of the Oedipus conflict, especially the rebellion against authority, is linked by Freud to the decline of religion and moral restraint. Freud (1923) argued that religion and morality, or "the higher nature of humans" (p. 34), were acquired through overcoming the Oedipus complex. However, the anger toward authority alone does not equate to a full liberation of the ID instincts. On the contrary, the pandemic led to a significant suppression of the ID for those who complied with the COVID restrictions. Many of our social needs were curtailed or highly regulated, our basic behaviors, such as touching our face, had to be monitored, and even feelings like fear, anxiety, and panic were controlled to prevent them from overwhelming us.

Some argue that during COVID, media censorship became prevalent. Mainstream media outlets often refused to publish alternative views or interview experts who questioned the government's stance on COVID rules and vaccines (Chang et al., 2022). Moreover, differing opinions that did appear were quickly removed from the web and made difficult to access. This kind of censorship, which suppresses instincts and impulses, seems to invoke the traditional Freudian super-ego rather than the postmodern super-ego, as Frankl might suggest. However, if we consider Žižek's interpretation of the postmodern super-ego, censorship becomes an integral part of it, though the content being censored has shifted. Now, it is about enforcing freedom,

equality, respect, self-expression, and enjoyment. This form of censorship, exemplified by political correctness, places significant pressure on individuals to conform to certain values and ideals. Contrary to Frankl's view, it's clear that there is still strong pressure on individuals to align with specific norms.

This leads to important questions: Who is the new authority that we serve? Why do we serve it? How does it communicate its will, and what are its ultimate goals? In the previous passage, Jesus cautiously raises these questions, acknowledging that since tradition no longer guides us and there is no universally accepted moral code, all our impulses, experiences, and actions have become subjects of extensive thought and debate. Why do we focus on certain information and prefer one analysis over another? Faced with a multitude of opinions, it becomes increasingly difficult to take a firm stance on any issue or individual. Instead of negating the super-ego, as George Frankl might argue, this reality only intensifies the anxiety that arises from constant doubt, desire, and reflection.

*"If the law has lost all its credibility, how do we differentiate between good and bad?"* This question, along with many others, arises from a culture rooted in relativism and subjectivity. Under the Freudian super-ego, anxiety was a result of the certainty of knowing what we must not do. In contrast, under the postmodern super-ego, anxiety stems from the absolute uncertainty of knowing what we should do. This conclusion suggests that the ego-ideal has replaced the super-ego. Clinical observations by Lieberman support this idea. She argues that the "new super-ego" is more narcissistic and subjective—being a "good person" is now defined by adapting to one's ideal of goodness, wealth, and beauty, rather than engaging in altruistic actions such as helping others, following moral codes (like the Ten Commandments), respecting the elderly, or simply being kind. People are now guided by a different set of values and standards that profoundly affect the nature and functioning of the super-ego.

The question that arises is whether these changes in the ego and super-ego (discussed in the article "Vertical Unconscious and New Defense Mechanisms") are the result of spontaneous societal shifts—due to changes in lifestyle, scientific advancements, technology, and digitalization—or whether they were intentionally directed by centers of power to create a specific type of person that fits their "agenda" during a particular historical period.

Throughout history, social influence has been achieved through typical mechanisms of shaping the mind, also known as "mindsets" or "means of socialization." These mechanisms can be understood in terms of different personality structures and their associated strategies:

1. Mechanisms of repression – Neurotic personality structure of the 19th century: In this period, there was a prohibition on sexuality and aggression. People experienced neurotic conflict and were conditioned to be obedient to authority.

2. Mechanisms of bribery – Narcissistic personality structure of the 20th century: This phase involved the prohibition of traditional values, which were replaced by the pursuit of "specialness." Individuals became driven by the desire to acquire things that symbolized value—essentially, becoming good buyers of what society deemed worthy.

3. Mechanisms of dulling – Perversion of personality structure in the 21st century: Here, the prohibition of independent thought became prominent. People's thinking had

to be shaped externally, leading to dependency, neuroticism, and a disconnection from traditional values and institutions. The individual became self-centered, using others as mere tools for personal gain.

4. Mechanisms of insanity – The likely psychotic culture of the near future: This involves withdrawal from reality, disinterest in the world around us, and the creation of personal "parallel universes." People may retreat into virtual reality, becoming socially useless, disconnected from meaningful social engagement and interaction.

These mechanisms, which are already becoming dominant, represent the shift toward a future where individuals are less connected to reality and more isolated in their subjective worlds.

Let's return to the question raised by Jesus: Who is the new authority we serve? Why do we serve it? How does it communicate, and what are its strategies and ultimate purpose? This raises crucial questions about the forces shaping us, especially in terms of the kind of personality structure that is being cultivated.

Who needs a perverse personality structure? A psychotic one? What will be done with these individuals as subjects? Are they simply replaceable by robots or artificial intelligence? If the ID (the unconscious aspect of the psyche) with its destructive forces—particularly the death instinct—no longer poses the primary danger to civilization, then what is the true source of humanity's vulnerability? According to some authors, the problem may lie not in the inherent ID but in the super-ego imposed by authority through socializing agents. But who or what has "spoiled" humanity for centuries?

It is clear that not all social institutions are inherently bad. Laws serve a purpose, and norms as social conventions help maintain order in society. But what explains the excess of limitations, the indulgence in debauchery, or the abuse of one person by another? Where is the source of this evil? Is it intrinsic to the ID of humankind, or does it originate from those in power who craft the deviations we see in the world?

Chomsky famously said, *"A smart way to keep people passive and obedient is to strictly limit the spectrum of acceptable thinking, but allow for a very lively discussion within that spectrum"* (1988). Does this phenomenon play out within psychoanalysis and psychotherapy? There's lively discussion in the field about the influence of parents—especially the mother—on psychological development. However, contemporary literature rarely addresses the broader societal influences: the media, social networks, and education systems. Even less often explored is the question of who is orchestrating these processes, who is behind the conceptual frameworks that shape these influences, and who is organizing the agents of socialization.

Does this extensive influence—these forces shaping human development and creating the ego and super-ego—ultimately contribute to the making of a *"useful idiot"*? This term, often used pejoratively, refers to someone who unconsciously or naively supports a political or ideological agenda that is not in their best interest. The term is often attributed to Lenin, though it is unclear whether he ever used it. It gained prominence during the Cold War and continues to describe those who uncritically support a political agenda.

But can this term be limited to political ideologies alone? Could it also apply to the lifestyle choices, the absence of moral values, the narcissistic superego, and the exploitation of others—

forms of behavior that reflect a broader, more systemic agenda? A way of life has emerged where individuals unknowingly or passively support the very systems that shape and distort their character. Could this unconscious compliance be part of a larger agenda—an ideological framework that seeks to create a specific type of person, one whose values and desires align with certain economic or political interests?

## Conclusion

Numerous clinicians, psychotherapists, and other practitioners have noticed significant changes in the ego and superego of clients, especially within Western culture. These practitioners are increasingly attempting to link these changes to societal causes, suggesting that various agents of socialization are playing a role in shaping individual transformations.

When discussing changes in the ego, as explored in the article *"Vertical Unconscious and New Defense Mechanisms,"* we can observe that the classical mechanisms associated with the "horizontal unconscious"—a term used to describe the unconscious resulting from repression—are being replaced by mechanisms tied to the vertical unconscious. To distinguish between these two forms of unconsciousness, we use "horizontal unconscious" to describe the repressed aspects of the psyche, while the "vertical unconscious" involves splitting and partialism—a mechanism that avoids connection, where the individual remains unaware of the interconnections between different aspects of the conscious mind. Within this vertical unconscious, new and previously undescribed defense mechanisms have emerged. While splitting (and its associated primitive defenses such as denial, projection, introjection, and projective identification) is well documented, we have also observed a tendency toward nonconnection—the refusal or inability to integrate and connect aspects of the self.

These changes in the ego, characterized by fragmentation, nonthinking, and disconnection, correspond with significant transformations in the superego. In particular, the superego has become more susceptible to uncritically absorbing external influences or introjects, further contributing to its fragmentation.

In this paper, we examine these shifts in the superego, attempting to trace their origins back to societal changes. We argue that the rise of narcissism and individualism in the late 20th century, combined with the valorization of selfishness, greed, wealth accumulation, and exploitation, laid the groundwork for the development of a perverse superego. This form of the superego encourages individuals to turn a blind eye to ethical deviations and moral lapses. It is important to note that this is not to suggest that most individuals exhibit these dynamics on a personal level within the clinical setting. Instead, we propose that society, as a whole, operates systematically on the basis of these dynamics, which then shape and influence individual behavior.

As the typical human mode of connection has shifted toward a more parasitic form—where relationships are increasingly exploitative—this, in turn, has affected both the ego and the superego. With this shift in how we relate to others and to reality, we must ask: What remains of the superego? Has it been deconstructed, or have significant changes occurred in its organization?

Psychoanalysts have traditionally looked to the id as the primary source of human destructiveness—the "beast" within each person. This focus has led them to overlook the possibility that destructiveness may instead be rooted in the superego. Over time, psychoanalytic theory has addressed the client's superego in various ways. Early thinkers like Alexander and Ferenczi suggested that the superego should be demolished, while Melanie Klein proposed that it should be transformed from its primitive, persecutory forms into one based on love for the object. Money-Kyrle further developed the idea of transforming immature forms of the superego into more mature ones, and Racker introduced the notion that self-love is the foundation of morality. Despite these theoretical developments, psychoanalysts have largely debated whether the superego should be demolished, transformed, or whether a foundation of self-love could lead to a mature morality based on love for others.

However, while psychoanalysts have been engaged in this theoretical debate, culture itself has evolved in ways that have influenced the organization and function of the superego. In doing so, it has created the "postmodern superego", a new structure that reflects the values, contradictions, and cultural shifts of the current era. This is not merely a theoretical construct, but a tangible phenomenon that can be observed in the behavior and attitudes of contemporary individuals.

The concept of the postmodern superego was introduced by Slavoj Žižek to describe the transformations he observed in the moral behavior of Western societies around the turn of the millennium. Postmodernists argue that rational and scientific values have led humanity into wars, as well as exacerbating poverty, prejudice, and oppression. Postmodernism is characterized by a skeptical and nihilistic stance toward universal concepts such as truth, reality, and knowledge, and also toward any form of authority. Does this signify the erosion of the superego? And, in this context, is this the outcome that Alexander and Ferenczi considered desirable?

The authorities in question here are not limited to political leaders or law enforcement, but also include God(s), parents, teachers, and anyone in a position of power. The relationship with these authorities, once characterized by respect, fear, and admiration, has now been replaced by anger, skepticism, mistrust, and uncertainty. This shift in authority undermines the traditional superego, which, according to Viktor Frankl, leads to what he refers to as the "murder of the superego." Similarly, Žižek (1999) describes the postmodern subject as increasingly narcissistic, fixated on freedom, self-fulfillment, and enjoyment. While Frankl focuses on the unchecked release of instinctual impulses, Žižek highlights the cultural ideology that underpins these impulses. Both thinkers agree that traditional values and parental authority have been dismantled in favor of freedom and liberation. However, this raises the question: What kind of freedom is this, and does it encompass responsibility?

Old values and the superego shaped by those values have been dismantled, but what remains in their place? Has something new been constructed—new values, meaning, or purpose?

The so-called "new normal" emerges as a result of the "hyper-normalization" of behaviors previously considered deviations from the norm. However, the question persists: why is there an increase in anxiety among individuals if they are no longer under the threat of a strict moralistic superego?

Jesus (and others) suggests that as the superego weakens, the ego ideal may become stronger, leading individuals to experience shame rather than guilt. Furthermore, since the ego ideal has historically been linked to narcissism, and postmodern society is often described as narcissistic, it could be posited that the ego ideal has assumed control of the psyche at the expense of the superego. This hypothesis may offer an explanation for the persistence of anxiety despite a weakened connection to traditional authority structures.

If we accept the postmodern emphasis on individualism and the obligation to be free, along with its dismantling of moral institutions, it becomes understandable why individuals experience a lack of moral direction. The freedom to make one's own choices, rather than providing clarity, only increases uncertainty and complicates decision-making. This is especially apparent when compared to the simplicity of adhering to tradition or religious doctrines, which predefine life's purpose and the means to achieve it.

The absence of guilt does not necessarily imply the destruction of the superego. If we consider Melanie Klein's concept of the dual superego, where good and bad are split through the mechanism of splitting, the lack of guilt might indicate the presence of a primitive and sadistic superego. This superego may not have reached the depressive position, in which the integration of good and bad objects and the need for reparation occur. Alternatively, this absence of guilt could signal a collective regression to a paranoid-schizoid position.

Žižek argues that the postmodern superego has introduced a unique obligation—the obligation to be free and to enjoy life. In this context, the ego ideal becomes a dictatorial force. If individuals are encouraged to maximize their pleasure and enjoy life to the fullest, they are compelled to comply. When they feel they could have experienced more pleasure or are unable to enjoy life as expected, they experience guilt for failing to meet the mandates of happiness and success dictated by the new era. In a society that no longer imposes moral obligations, postmodern individuals impose them on themselves. They feel compelled to fulfill these "chosen" norms, as they perceive themselves as the ones who "chose" them. Postmodern society, though appearing permissive, is in fact filled with rules and imposed expectations disguised as efforts to ensure happiness. Rather than feeling guilty for causing harm or injustice to others, the modern person is more likely to feel guilty for indulging in a sweet treat while dieting, for skipping the gym (responding to the narcissistic imperative of physical appearance), or for failing to post something attractive on Instagram or another social network that showcases the quality of their life.

Patrick McGinnis conceptualized new anxieties of the digital age: FOMO (Fear of Missing Out), the fear of missing something or being uninformed, and FOBO (Fear of Better Options), the fear of committing to one choice because a better alternative might always be available.

The neo-normal superego (or ego ideal) is liberal toward most ethical norms, yet rigid, dogmatic, and prone to dictatorial tendencies on certain "chosen issues." One might question which master it serves and the purpose for which it is designed.

Lieberman concludes that the "new superego" is based on a distinct moral framework grounded in narcissism.

Jesus (2020), observing human behavior across various countries during the COVID-19 pandemic, attempted to analyze the postmodern superego, viewing it as a fragile structure capable of reverting to previous forms (such as the repressive superego, obedient to authority) when needed or when a significant threat arises. However, he remains uncertain in his conclusion and leaves open the possibility that adherence to COVID-19 regulations supports the idea of a postmodern superego rather than indicating a regression. As Lipovetsky observed, hypermodern societies have developed a heightened concern for solidarity and fairness. If the COVID-19 regulations were understood as a societal duty, a moral obligation to act ethically, those who complied might support their individual sovereignty by adopting government directives as their personal beliefs. This could be seen as a way of submitting to authority without acknowledging it explicitly, thus maintaining their individualism.

Regarding Jesus' conclusion, a justified question arises. His conclusion presupposes that the authority, in the context of the pandemic, is rational, that it does not exploit the situation for profit, infringe upon human rights, or implement a form of "medical dictatorship." This perspective also assumes that opposing viewpoints and warnings are mere "conspiracy theories" spread by those influenced by the "postmodern superego," who irrationally seek to overthrow authority, even at great personal cost and at the risk of endangering public safety and societal stability. It suggests that a regression to the older, "Freudian superego" might be viewed as a preferable solution in times of crisis (as if such regression were beneficial).

Risking the label of a "conspiracy theorist," could we, for the sake of scientific skepticism and the allowance of alternative perspectives, pose the question of whether the authority—particularly in the case of the pandemic and its accompanying measures—is becoming increasingly malevolent? Through total media control and the suppression of professional debate, might authority be introducing new introjects into the superego, demanding absolute obedience? A superego that dictates: "You may do as you wish—be hedonistic, selfish, narcissistic, reject all moral norms, values, and faith, discard collective identities (be they national, familial, gender-based, or even human). And this is acceptable. Everything is permitted, except opposing this worldview or challenging my global agenda." It seems that Jesus does not engage with this possibility, at least not hypothetically. He continues to frame the behavior of those opposing government measures as an unconscious struggle with paternal authority, an eruption of aggressive impulses from the id, thereby disregarding the potential that these individuals might be resisting on the basis of rational, informed opposition to manipulation and the erosion of human rights.

Nonetheless, Jesus (2020) observes the confusion individuals experience regarding whom or what to trust. While under the Freudian superego, anxiety arose from certainty about what one must not do, under the postmodern superego, anxiety emerges from a profound uncertainty about what one should do.

Examining the broader societal changes in the superego through the lens of neoliberalism, which stands as the dominant political ideology in the West, reveals similar mechanisms of fragmentation as seen in the individual's ego. Society has become sharply polarized, with one side (typically the left, or globalists) focusing on dismantling traditional values and collective identities, while the other side (typically the right, or sovereigntists) strives to preserve and strengthen them. These ideological divisions manifest in everyday socialization processes, shaping the individual through family, education, and the media. Through processes of

introjection and identification, individuals are increasingly fragmented and confused, hindering the development of a coherent self-image and an understanding of the world and the values that should be internalized.

There exists a profound ambivalence within society, which also reflects on the individual level. People struggle to construct a coherent value system because the moral image of the world has become divided, fragmented, and polarized. The positive and negative aspects of values no longer communicate with one another, as they are separated by mechanisms of splitting and partialization. Each side clings to what is beneficial for itself, while projecting opposing values onto others. This leads to the reinforcement of individual, often illogical, and irrational stances that are based more on superficial emotional reactions than on thoughtful, reasoned consideration.

Thus, the problem of moral judgment arises. Since these judgments often result from deeply ingrained but unconscious introjections, individuals become increasingly defensive in upholding their views. Polarization is not merely an ideological struggle but a profound psychological division that prevents meaningful dialogue and healthy discussion, ultimately impeding the ability to form complex ethical conclusions. This phenomenon is not only an individual issue but has evolved into a societal problem, pervading all spheres of social life.

In this fragmented social context, a crucial question emerges: How do we navigate a world in which truth is relativized and moral values become subjective? The distinction between good and evil becomes a matter of personal allegiance, while truth increasingly becomes a narrative shaped by ideological forces. Each side perceives itself as representing the "good," while opposing viewpoints are framed as "evil," fostering confusion and uncertainty in everyday life.

On the individual level, the consequences of this collective confusion are evident. Many individuals, confronted with complete uncertainty about what is right, retreat into their “safe zones,” where they believe they can maintain control. However, this often leads them to become what might be termed “useful idiots”—unquestioning followers of ideological narratives, who fail to critically assess the truthfulness or ethical justification of the ideologies they adopt.

In such a world, the role of the therapist cannot be confined solely to addressing the individual problems of clients. Our clients present challenges that are not only the result of their internal conflicts but also the broader social "radiation" that permeates their micro-world. As therapists, we are confronted with the question of how to maintain value neutrality while remaining attuned to the broader social reality. Are our therapeutic tools and techniques adequate to address this pervasive societal confusion?

Within the framework of O.L.I. Integrative Psychodynamic Psychotherapy, specific methodological approaches have been developed to address the defragmentation of the Ego and Superego. The aim is to foster the development of object integrity, as well as the maturation of introjects—from primitive, raw introjects to those that can be consciously processed, accepted through identification, or, if necessary, rejected. This approach provides an opportunity to overcome polarized, emotionally charged stances and offers clients tools to achieve inner balance, thereby fostering the development of a healthier and more coherent value system.

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