The Search for Satisfaction: A Journey Through Drive, Jouissance And Repetition Incorporating Neuroscience

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Abstract:

Understanding drives is essential because they tell us about that original encounter in which a somatic stimulus touches something of the mental representations. This work is an attempt to recollect previous research and construct a parallel of psychoanalytic concepts and neuroscientific findings such as the correspondence between drive and libido and the dopaminergic seeking system. We are mind, body and language.

In our research we present the hypothesis that there are three existing paths of obtaining certain level of satisfaction – pleasure, jouissance and death drive, led by the pleasure principle of partial satisfaction and the Nirvana principle of (impossible) complete satisfaction.

In *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*, Freud reviews his own drive theory incorporating a new term - death drive. Freud theorized about compulsion repetition, a cycle in which a behavior is carried out repeatedly and repressed material is lived instead of remembered, let alone elaborated. He observes that some are not guided by the principle of pleasure seeking, which reveals a complacency of the subject with the suffering of his symptoms, beyond their conscious yearning for healing. While the goal of the life drives is self-preservation, sexual satisfaction, creation and procreation, the final goal of the death drive appears to be to completely reduce tensions and return the living individual to the inorganic state of stillness and repose which is unachievable.

When Jacques Lacan introduces the concept of jouissance (enjoyment), he refers to this mythical state of complete satisfaction before the barrier of the castration as such.

The way to achieve this state of minimum tension, can as well be mediated by addiction and/or compulsive behavior as we have seen before, suppressing the internal tension of stimulus and surrendering to the principle of Nirvana and the death drives – complete reduction of any tension. Now we know that the frontal cortex is responsible for regulating the instinctual reactions and puts them in social context. But when one appears to be struggling to achieve satisfaction by harmful or unpleasant actions this can be common consequence of the dopaminergic reward functions, resulting in a paradoxically dysfunctional behavior. Repetition is an important brain function. Repetition is involved in learning processes and improves performance. In this theoretical research we would like to review and differentiate between efficient, rewarding repetition and repetition compulsion in order to further clarify how satisfaction can be achieved and up to what point.

In Freudian theory there are two categories of drives - life drive and death drive. The life drives, also referred to as Eros, include both sexual urges and self-preservation urges driven by the pleasure principle. The drive that opposes them is designated by Freud as death drive or Thanatos.

In his 1920 work *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*, Freud reviews and critiques his own theory incorporating a new term - death drive. The political and social events of the time make him reflect on man's ability to obtain satisfaction and to ask himself whether there is anything beyond the pleasure principle.

Until then in Freudian theory there is the division of drives as ego drives (partial) and sexual drives. The first are born and are satisfied within the same organ, for example hunger is a partial drive that is satisfied in the digestive system with food, while sexual drive can take different routes to obtain satisfaction. However, this satisfaction is always incomplete.

One of the reasons that led Freud to establish the existence of a death drive was to consider the phenomena of repetition that he observes in patients, which cannot be reduced to the search for the pleasure of libido or the attempt to control unpleasant experiences. Moreover, Freud

observes a series of paradoxical facts that contradict the supposed orientation of the subject guided by the principle of pleasure seeking. Freud observes the negative reaction, which reveals a secret complacency of the subject with the suffering of his symptoms, beyond his conscious yearning for healing. While the goal of the life drives is self-preservation, sexual satisfaction, creation and procreation, the question stands is the final goal of the death drive to completely reduce tensions and return the living individual to the inorganic state of stillness and repose which is unachievable. The general goal of life drives is to keep the organism and species alive while the goal of death drives is the complete discharge of tension/return to an inanimate, inorganic state.

It is important to mention that at this stage of Freudian theory the principles that regulate psychic life are defined as the principle of pleasure and the principle of reality.

Freud defines pleasure and displeasure as the reduction and increase of an amount of excitement present in the nervous system at any moment (Freud S. Beyond the pleasure principle, 1920). The principle of pleasure supposes that the psychic apparatus strives to keep the level of excitation as low as possible or at least constant. while the principle of reality regulates the levels of excitement through the demand of ego drives and the characteristics of the physical or social environment preventing the subject of achieving satisfaction in an unacceptable or dangerous way. Now we know that the frontal cortex is responsible for regulating the instinctual reactions and puts them in social context. But do we know what happens when one appears to be struggling to achieve satisfaction by harmful or unpleasant actions?

In 1953 Jacques Lacan introduces the concept of *jouissance* (enjoyment) in his first seminar, but he develops the concept more rigidly in 1960 where he refers to this metical state of complete satisfaction before the barrier of the castration as such. It is then kidnaped by the symbolic order of the language and it remains forever limited to the possibilities that the social being has and is able to express in words. This leaves significant part of the pre-Oedipical enjoyment out of reach, creating symptoms in the desperate attempt of regression to a joyful state.

The concept of *jouissance* adds valuable theocratization Freud's Beyond the Pleasure Principle because clinical experience contradicts both principles - that of pleasure and that of reality especially in phenomena such as masochism, destruction and self-destruction.

The way to achieve this state of minimum tension, can as well be mediated by addiction and/or compulsive behavior as we have seen before, suppressing the internal tension of stimulus and surrendering to the principle of Nirvana and the death drives – complete reduction of desire. On fig.1 you can see our model of the economic problem of the drives where the excitement is presented as pendulum where the *jouissance* and the pleasure of seeking (Bazan, 2013) are on the high end of excitation, while the Nirvana principle represents the idealization of the complete discharge.

This idea that the death drive and the impulse to return to inorganic matter forms the theory that every living being has been before in a mythical nonliving time, so, the satisfaction of the drive would be a return to an earlier state. According to Freud, part of this aggressive and self-destructive drive is put at the service of sexuality, for example in the case of sadism and masochism. In the case of masochism, the aggressive drive remains in the organism.

In *The Economic Problem of Masochism* of 1924, Freud asks himself again about the dominance of the principle of pleasure in every aspect of life. According to him we are tempted to call the principle of pleasure, the guardian of our life, but then the task is to investigate the relations of the pleasure principle with the two types of drives we have differentiated: the death drives and the erotic (libidinous) life drives.

Seems that Lacan with his concept of *jouissance* consolidates this motion in the same psychical mechanism of a discharge. But while Freud's libido is always object oriented, therefore incomplete, his death drive seeks complete discharge in the most extreme form and it is rarely attached to an object outside of the body and the psyche of the subject. It is the same motion but lead to an extreme. It is visible in addictions, compulsions, eating disorders, toxicomania etc.

In his Seminar VII Jacques Lacan observes the subject of the death drive. He agrees with Freud's idea that the impulses of life and death are part of the psyche and have great importance in the construction of the psyche.

The need for destruction comes along with creation because too perfect a harmony would have even more drawbacks than disorder. But the death drive is much more than disorder. Death is the natural order and a feature of humanity, a state of absolute rest, at least to a certain limit state of universal equilibrium (Lacan J. Seminar VII 1960).

On neurological level the reward system in the brain involves the mesolimbic and the mesocortical pathways which connect the Ventral Tegmental Area in the hypothalamus to the Nucleus Accumbens in the mesolimbic area and finally to the frontal cortex. This system is mostly regulated by Dopamine, the neurotransmitter responsible of the reward response. The circuit releases Dopamine when a reward is received. When the reward is higher or unexpected the amount of Dopamine released is higher. On the other side, when the reward is lower of the expected or keeps the same for a long time, the levels of Dopamine released are lower. This system creates an important vital function which is repetition, guaranteeing that those acts that generate rewards (ie: drinking water, feeding, sexual intercourse) are repeatedly sought to get the wellness feeling produced by Dopamine.

Repetition can be distorted with some conducts, that cause mental and physical damage (addictions, excessive feeding), even though they prompt release of Dopamine. The relation between Dopamine release and addiction is well known, being a clear example of how higher levels of Dopamine, produce angst and suffering instead of pleasure. In a recent study (Yang, 2018), the authors found that dopaminergic system in the Nucleus Accumbens has different pathways which work in different and opposite ways. Therefore, when one of the dopaminergic

circuits is stimulated it generates reward seeking, and when the other one does, it generates behavior inhibition. Consequently, we can argue that the higher levels of Dopamine in the Reward system are not necessarily related with higher wellness and satisfaction. This can be also represented in the concept of *jouissance* (Bazan, 2013).

Another possible explanation for Lacan's death drive is the desire to unite with the outside world and eliminate the heterogeneity that distinguishes one's own body and the outside world. He considers that there is something that intervenes, that introducing that element of structure, this is the distinction between the animate organism and the inanimate organism. This heterogeneity introduces the conflict in the level of the living structure, as such.

The question of the death drive, in the first place, is represented in an energetic discourse as a complete discharge that can be produced in the death of the body uniting it with nature and the inanimate world.

As an example of the desire to unite to the outside, to something that once belonged to the body but was lost in an earlier mythical time of Oedipus. Freud takes for example the myth about androgynous, told by Aristophanes in Plato's *Banquet*. In this myth is expressed the need to look for the lost stocking that will cure all the incompleteness that the individual feels. We all are all to some degree influenced by this fantasy, aren't we?

The ethical-social discourse of the death drive can be observed in the context in which Freud writes *Beyond the Principle of Pleasure* but, as Lacan observes, Freud does not take a progressive discourse in the observation of the psychic processes that represent destruction, sadomasochism and repetition. His intention has always been the analysis of the unconscious processes that occurs in human beings and not in the development of ideas that can take a political imputation.

At the philosophical level the essence of human life is related to its fundamental trait - finality. That is why there should be a psychic instance dedicated to bringing all personal experience to an end, but its enigmatic nature however the possibility of understanding it would be limited since the principles that regulate it are mostly inaccessible by reason.

Finally, the energetic question of the death drive is also expressed by Lacan in the analysis of Sade's work and the enjoyment (and discharge) that occurs through reading and sadomasochistic fantasies, but also in the extreme cases of invasion of the enjoyment without an object of desire such as addictions, compulsions, eating disorders, toxicomania. Neuropsychanalysis¹ can research the nature of this attempt for complete discharge and study the connection between death drive, enjoyment and satisfaction on neurological level.

¹ The existence of death drive was a topic of discussion on the World Congress of Neuropsychanalysis in 2019 titled *Satisfaction at Last*. A few factors came up in every discussion: first, from neuroscientific point of view life resist entropy and maintains its existence. There is no solid scientific data that confirms the impulse of the organism to seize to exist. On the other hand, clinical practice has witnessed abundant number of cases where psychological life drives to an end the biological.

This topic remains under discussion, but one thing is clear – the desire to end the excitation related to suffering is closely related to the death drive and the Nirvana principle.

Fig.1

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