

Productivity in face of a „pathology of normalcy“. Erich Fromm’s contribution to Critical Psychology

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ABSTRACT

This article, based on the author’s keynote speech at the first International Conference on Critical and Radical Humanist Work and Organizational Psychology at the University of Innsbruck, draws on radical humanist theorizing on human productivity and the „pathology of normalcy“ in demonstrating the importance of the contribution of Erich Fromm as a basis for Critical Psychology¹. The sociologist and psychoanalyst Erich Fromm (1900-1980) developed a social psychological method, the special significance of which is that it explicitly captures unconscious motivations and impulses. This makes it possible to identify strivings and behaviors, as well as common values and thought patterns, which, from a humanistic perspective, represent socially patterned mental „defects“. Based on Fromm’s concept of social character, what is perceived as „normal“ and „reasonable“ in a given society can be exposed as a potential „pathology of normalcy“. After briefly outlining major concerns of the project of Critical Psychology, Erich Fromm’s social-psychoanalytical approach is introduced. The following sections are dedicated to the significance of character formation for explaining social behavior, social repression and socially patterned defects. Next, some indications will be given regarding the meaning of human productivity according to Erich Fromm. Subsequently, the pathogenic impacts of social character orientations will be illustrated based on the exemplary types of the authoritarian and the contemporary marketing social character. The article concludes with a short summary of Erich Fromm’s contribution to Critical Psychology.

Keywords

Erich Fromm – Critical Psychology – social character theory – economic vs. human productivity – authoritarian character – marketing character

What is Critical Psychology about?

What *critical* work and organizational psychologists have in common, is a clear understanding that, as psychologists, they should not be degraded to mere servants of a certain economic philosophy, mode of production, or work organization. *Critical* psychologists, therefore, aim to question mainstream interpretations, that is to say, what is considered reasonable and normal in business and society – but also in psychology itself (cf. Kühn, 2015).

The impetus for this critical questioning is motivated in different ways. At its core, however, is typically the question of whether either *economic* productivity or *human* productivity should be the predominantly guiding ethical value in the mode

of production and in the organization of work. Both the primacy of physical survival and historically established power relationships are used to argue in favor of putting human beings at the service of economic productivity. On the other hand, however, the associated effects of doing so, in terms of disease, alienation and social inequality, are so obvious, such that priority must be given to human productivity – and thus to individual and social human well-being.

Above all, it is the question of the *counterproductive human impacts* of the prevailing mode of production and organization of work, which is calling a *Critical Psychology* into action. Typically, the main focus today is no longer on physical illnesses caused by toxic substances or physical exploitation, but on psychological and psychosomatic illnesses, such as

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depression and anxiety disorders as well as pain diseases and forms of self-exploitation, leading to burnout and chronic fatigue syndromes.

Critical Psychology sees beyond such pathological phenomena and identifies additional counterproductive effects on humans: It observes – compare, for instance, the Gallup index – the loss of emotional attachment to work, to leaders, to the company or the organization, a lack of motivation, resistance in the form of „working only according to instruction“, „internal resignation“, increased job turnover, and so on. The loss of certain mental and social skills has an even more serious impact on economic and human productivity: the capacity for personal (rather than technical) creativity; the ability to develop an empathy capable of caring and considering the consequences of one’s actions; or the capacity for a sociality that respects the dignity of others and, instead of establishing inequalities and dependencies, realizes democratic forms of coexistence.

Critical Psychologists try to see such counterproductive developments in a larger context: What do they have to do with the great technological, economic, and social changes of our times? And, if inequality, alienation, and pathogenic developments can indeed be linked to such structural changes, what does this mean for the question of transformational strategy – for example, in the field of work and organizational psychology? Here the word „radical“, in the title of this conference, makes sense: One has to go psychologically to the roots – radices – of the problem – and analyze the altered relational structures that have been formed by industrial and digital revolutions and neoliberal economics – and that are counterproductive from a human (and, in the end, also an economic) point of view.

An important starting point is certainly to try to change the new patterns of thinking and attitudes that have developed with the changed relational structures by means of promoting humanistic values and certain experience-based learning methods. Whether such a cognitive-behavioral approach can actually achieve the desired transformations is precisely the question that Erich Fromm and psychoanalysis have posed.

In the following, we will deal with a *Critical Psychology* that also makes the unconscious, in the form of non-conscious cognitions and emotions, the object of interest. It therefore sees the mental above all in affect- and emotion-bound strivings, which influence thinking, feeling and acting consciously and unconsciously. In the next step, I would like to illustrate, how this can be done by means of Erich Fromm’s social-psychoanalytic method and theory.

Erich Fromm’s social-psychoanalytical approach

Fromm’s decisive scientific contribution must be seen in having developed a distinctive social-psychological theory and method which explains, how society is represented in the individual through a specific psychological structure formation – the social character (Fromm, 1937 / 2010, 1941, pp. 277-299, 1962; see Funk, 2022a, 2019, pp. 54-65). This social character is the reason that a multitude of individuals displays similar patterns of thinking, feeling, and acting, and that all tend to strive for what a particular society needs for its existence and functioning. The uniform will and striving of the many, made possible by the social character formation, thus psychologically forms the cement of a given society.

The special feature of this approach is that it can also be used to explain how it comes about that the many individuals develop strivings that are counterproductive, without the people concerned being aware of this. On the contrary: The counterproductive strivings that determine thinking, feeling and acting are experienced and rationalized as healthy, reasonable, right, and normal. How did Fromm arrive at such a social-psychoanalytic approach?

Two questions occupied Fromm throughout his life: Why do people behave *irrationally*, and what makes a large number of people think, feel and act *similarly*? Why do people not actually behave as they think and intend to behave? Why do they act contrarily to their own values? Why are they plagued by groundless fears? Why do their intentions fail? Or a completely different example of irrational behavior: why do people always want to be like others, without making their *own* judgments or feeling their *own* needs? Fromm was already moved by this question in 1914, when the First World War broke out and was supported enthusiastically by a majority.

Fromm answered this first question, what makes people think, feel and act irrationally and dysfunctionally, with the insights of Sigmund Freud’s psychoanalysis into the unconscious and repressed (Fromm, 1962, pp. 88-132). When certain affects (such as fear), feelings (such as aggression), ideas (such as grandiosity), and desires (such as erotic longing) are taboo for personal or social reasons or lead to conflicts, people can repress these so that they are no longer aware of them. And yet, what was repressed controls the person’s thinking, feeling and acting in a concealed way (aggression is projected, for example, so that not myself but the other is experienced as aggressive). The repressed has the effect that people behave irrationally, because they are not aware of certain affects, desires, etc.

The second question that preoccupied Fromm throughout his life is: What makes many people think, feel and act *similarly*? This is about group behavior and about the question of which inner strivings lead to a similarity of behavior, so that the result is cohesion instead of confusion and social anomie. What inner drives result in similar thinking, feeling and acting of the many – even if this is irrational or hostile?

It was precisely this question that led Fromm to combine the psychoanalytic findings on repression with the sociological question of what inwardly causes people to behave in a uniform manner. Whenever an individual behaves in an enduringly consistent way, a psychological structure formation occurs. Psychoanalysis calls such a structural formation *character*, whereby Fromm had the ingenious idea to start from two types of character formation, which differ with respect to their origin and function: the individual character and the social character.

In contrast to Sigmund Freud and Karl Abraham, character formation according to Fromm does not follow an intrinsic drive-dynamic oriented toward erogenous zones of the body (oral, anal, phallic, genital). Rather, the character-related striving and behavior result from the influence of repeated experiences of relatedness on the cognitive and emotional impulses. According to Fromm, two different character formations can be distinguished: The individual character and the social character (Fromm, 1962, pp. 71-88). The *individual* character develops on the basis of repeatedly made and therefore internalized experiences of relatedness that are specific to this individual: with early attachment figures, on the basis of personal circumstances, sibling experiences, turns of fate, etc. The *social* character results from the adaptation and internalization of the economic circumstances, the cultural and technical conditions, and the social coexistence. It arises from the innate need for a sense of social identity. The social character explains why many people think, feel and act similarly. Moreover, the social character can be more or less irrational and counterproductive or – as Fromm says – non-productive for the achievement of successful coexistence.

The crucial point of Fromm's social character theory is to be seen in the fact that in each individual human being, society with its economic and cultural possibilities and requirements of living together, are also represented. The social character makes the individual think, feel and act in a way necessary for a certain social coexistence. At this point, let's inquire a little deeper specifically into the importance of the capacity for character formation to explain social behavior.

The significance of character formation for explaining social behavior

The *one* distinctive feature of character formation is that it shapes behavior in a constant and consistent way (see Fromm, 1947, pp. 54-61). Therefore, it is reasonable to assume an underlying character formation when it comes to similarities in the thinking, feeling and acting of many people. With the concept of a social character formation affecting the many individuals of a social group, the phenomenon of social identity can be explained psychoanalytically.

The *other* distinctive feature of character formation is that character-conditioned behavior is experienced as *ego-syntonic*, which means as natural, normal, reasonable, and healthy, even when character formation is in the service of repression and, therefore, results in counterproductive effects. A simple example of this is a compulsive character who locks his car with the central locking system, but nevertheless checks every single door to make sure they are really closed – and does not let himself be dissuaded from doing so, because his behavior appears reasonable to him.

The ego-syntonic quality of a character formation has the great advantage that a person can experience himself identically with his behaviors, even when counterproductive behavior is concerned. The ego-syntonic quality then ensures that the behavior does not generate any level of suffering. To illustrate this once again with the example of a compulsive person: Instead of a compulsive *character*, he could also just develop compulsive *symptoms* and suffer endlessly from the fact that he has to get up again at least five times before falling asleep, in order to make sure that there really is no candle burning or that the apartment door is locked.

Counterproductive inner strivings due to repressions can thus articulate themselves in very different ways. Character formations in the service of repression show the great *subjective* advantage that the counterproductive defect is experienced ego-syntonically and without significant suffering. For this reason alone, what is experienced as healthy and normal cannot be a sufficient criterion for psychic productiveness.

What has been illustrated here in the case of an individual compulsive person also applies to social character formations that are in the service of social repressions. The ego-syntonic quality of character formation leads the many to experience certain counterproductive strivings as normal and reasonable. Even in their counterproductive strivings, they experience a sense of belonging and their social identity.

Social character, social repression and socially patterned defects

How can we understand social repression and social unconsciousness? Let's take, for example, an economic system organized according to the principles of neoliberalism and controlled by globalized „cut-throat“ competition. Such a system needs people who have a desire to compete, to eliminate rivals and to win at all costs. Such a model of coexistence is just as counterproductive for social and workplace coexistence as it is for family relationships; above all, however, it contradicts the innate growth-tendency of every human being towards developing abilities of prosociality, solidarity and empathy.

In order to nevertheless have people competing and wanting to win for the job market, „social filters“ (Fromm, 1962, pp. 115-124) are created in the public consciousness, which promote those mental abilities that distinguish „winners“ and that help to repress those abilities that are solidary, compassionate, and not success-oriented. According to Fromm, in this case, those „social filters“ have the function to portray the desire to compete and to win as the most normal thing in the world and to let it become a basic aspiration, which characterizes our thinking, feeling and acting.

Not only in organizations and companies, but also in private and public life, it's all about winning and victories, bestseller lists, the number of points achieved, the ranking, how often one is cited, how many followers you have, how many „likes“ you get, how high your audience rating is, etc. In leisure time, too, it's all about winning and competition: Especially in sports and in the reporting of sporting competitions, in quiz shows, in bargain hunting – and clever marketing strategists even combine an invitation to visit a museum with a lottery. At every turn, we learn that life is a competition and that it's all about being victorious.

With the help of such social filters, humanly counterproductive social-character strivings are made to appear as natural, normal, healthy and reasonable, and, at the same time, productive human capacities are de-activated and repressed. The ego-syntonic quality of character formation ensures that those affected do not suffer from their increasing inability to feel empathy for the weak, the „losers“, and the poor.

The absence of suffering in counterproductive strivings led Erich Fromm to speak of a „pathology of normalcy“ and to distinguish between a neurosis and a „socially patterned defect“ (Fromm, 1944, 1955, pp. 12-21). Neuroses are always accompanied by symptom formation and generate a sense of suffering; therefore, it does not make sense to speak with Freud of a „social neurosis“ („Gemeinschaftsneurose“, Fromm 1955, p. 19), but of a defect: „For most of them,

the culture provides patterns which enable them *to live with a defect without becoming ill*“ (Fromm 1955, p. 17).

The unconscious suffering from a socially patterned defect does not remain without consequences. On the one hand – to stay with the example of competing and wanting to win – this character striving acts like an opiate: „If the opiate against the socially patterned defect were withdrawn, the manifest illness would make its appearance“ (Fromm 1955, p. 17). In fact, severe psychic suffering occurs frequently when winning is suddenly no longer possible – for example, due to the loss of a job, an accident or a serious physical illness, or the breakup of a meaningful personal relationship.

According to Fromm, however, the counterproductive quality of a socially patterned defect also manifests itself in the fact that it can lead to strong psychological *reactions*: When feelings of solidarity and compassion for losers and the weak are no longer practiced, or when empathy for moments of failure, breakdown and loss is no longer felt, this often leads to sudden internal reactions, such as aggressive states of restlessness, a paralyzing apathy and listlessness, strong fears of loss and panic attacks, or a depressive inability to sense one's own feelings. Such decompensations, often diagnosed as burnout and fatigue syndrome, can very well be understood as reactions to socially patterned defects (which, by the way, is also reflected in the psychotherapeutic treatment for such illnesses).

Despite these clear indications of the counterproductive effect of socially patterned defects, it remains to be noted that social character formations are usually symptom-free psychological adaptations to an economically and socially required life practice. This may also involve the internalization of counterproductive mental strivings, so that in the case of social character formations, the type and extent of the „pathology of normalcy“ must be examined in greater detail.

What does human productivity mean according to Erich Fromm?

Next, I now want to address, by providing at least some indications, what defines Fromm's understanding of human productivity and how he goes about to establish a humanistic social psychology (cf. in more detail Fromm, 1947, pp. 82-107; Funk, 2003, 2019, pp. 72-84). The starting point for what Fromm calls (human) „productivity“ is, on the one hand, the special biological situation of man: to be determined less and less by instinctive-genetic specifications, and being able to create new forms of relatedness through

the means of self-consciousness and imagination. On the other hand, man shares with all forms of life an intrinsic tendency for growth, which creates an aspiration to allow the growth potential for this form of life to be realized.

The productive growth potentials possible for man result, above all, from his neuronal abilities: self-reflexive cognitive abilities (that may result in → rational thinking), imagination-directed affect control (loving feelings) and imaginative reality generation (→ creative fantasy). Whether cognitive, emotional and imaginative abilities are productively growing can be assessed and measured with indicators of optimal psychosocial development. Some of these shall be mentioned here:

- The ability to connect imagination and affect and thus to be able to control oneself independently of caregivers (→ ability for autonomy);
- the ability to distinguish between positive and negative aspects of reality, other people and one's own self (→ ability for ambiguity);
- the ability to tolerate ambiguous perceptions and feelings („both this and that“) in others and in oneself (instead of projecting and splitting) (→ ability for ambivalence);
- the ability to distinguish between the „I“ and affect or feelings (→ affect control);
- the ability to distinguish between the „I“ and desire, fantasy, fiction or virtuality (→ reality control, sense of reality, „objectivity“);
- the ability to distinguish between socially prescribed and one's own value concepts (→ individualized social self-esteem).

If the productive development is *hindered* by counterproductive ways of being related, these abilities develop only to a limited extent and will be lost again in stressful situations. If the development is *thwarted*, a destructive tendency of decay occurs instead of a creative growth tendency. Fromm's core thesis is therefore that a humanly productive life, economy and coexistence has the practice of the optimally differentiated cognitive, emotional and imaginative abilities of the person as its prerequisite and goal.

Erich Fromm's critical social psychology is characterized by the fact that it also includes in the critique of those socially patterned psychological defects that are inherent in social character formations. The more dominant a humanly non-productive social character orientation is, the less it is recognized as pathogenic. Rather, those affected as well as the public, perceive it as normal, healthy, and rational. Finally, it will now be shown by way of example, looking at two specific social character orientations, what the defects regarding human productivity consist of in each case.

Social character orientations and their pathogenic impacts

In the course of his life, Fromm described in detail a number of social character formations and examined their pathogenic impacts. Fromm did this most extensively for the authoritarian social character and for the marketing social character. Therefore, these two types will be used to show which counterproductive skills are demanded and promoted, and which productive abilities are repressed. Other orientations include the hoarding, the necrophilic and the narcissistic social character, as well as the ego-oriented social character identified by myself using Fromm's method (see Funk, 2019, pp. 95-143, as well as the videos on the Erich Fromm Study Center YouTube channel: <https://efsc.ipu-berlin.de/en/media-center>).

The authoritarian social character

Fromm speaks of an *authoritarian orientation*, when the state of being related to others, to oneself, to nature, to work, etc., is a result of the *active* (sadistic) exercise of dominance and the *passive* (masochistic) exercise of submissiveness, whereby the dominant and the submissive are *symbiotically* related to each other (see Fromm, 1941, pp. 141-179).

The active (*sadistic*) domination-exercising aspects of this character aim to make and keep *others* submissive and dependent, to patronize, exploit or torture them. If this tendency is directed *against oneself*, then authoritarians display a high degree of self-control, self-discipline, and feelings of guilt. They then show signs of a rigid 'Super-ego', which forbids everything pleasurable and frivolous.

Typical for the passive (*masochistic*) aspect of the authoritarian character are submissiveness under and blind obedience to authority and idealization of authority. All good things are expected to come from the authority. In *dealing with oneself*, the masochistic striving expresses itself in a renunciation of everything that is self-willed, self-confident, of one's own rights and wishes – and of all expressions of autonomy. The 'selfless' is the ideal of the passive authoritarian.

Further, a central feature of Fromm's understanding of authoritarianism is that the person exercising authority and the submissive person are *symbiotically* dependent on and emotionally bound to each other. This symbiosis denotes the *psychodynamics* of the authoritarian character: The submissive person, under pressure from the ruler, *projects his own autonomous powers* onto the authority, so that the latter has them at his disposal. However, since the submissive person is symbiotically connected with the authority, he can *secondarily participate* in his own powers projected onto the authority. In this way,

the person exercising dominance and the submissive person are existentially related to each other and a *strong emotional bond* is created.

Let's ask first: Which counterproductive character strivings are strengthened in the authoritarian social character?

- The crucial characteristic is that one *submits* to the given circumstances, without asking for their purpose and justification.
- *Loyalty* plays a very important role in all relationships and is often only attainable by fatalistically submitting to the conditions.
- *Obedience* is a central value in all relationships, particularly in authoritarian education, and is learned through castigation; disobedience is the worst sin.
- Any kind of *willfulness* must also be banished at an early stage in order to become a loyal and devoted employee or civil servant.
- A last 'must' of the authoritarian character, which should be mentioned here, is the *feeling of dependence and gratefulness* on the part of the submissive person and of *arbitrary freedom and patronizing* on the part of the person exercising dominance.

Let us now ask which productive human strivings have to be *repressed* in the case of an authoritarian social character orientation:

- Repressed, if possible, must be all *autonomous impulses* that express something independent and of one's *own* in thinking, feeling and acting, and hence signal potential independence.
- First and foremost, all of one's *own powers* that could be in competition with authority must be mentioned here: *one's own thoughts, convictions and ideas*, especially if they question the authority's claim to dominance (in business, politics, religion, culture, society and state...).
- All ways of *self-determination* are dangerous: regardless of whether this refers to family or professional role attributions or religious rituals, the question of gender or sexual preferences, political freedom of expression or artistic freedoms. Self-determination is understood as *rebellion* against the grace, wisdom, care and superiority of the authority, which always knows better what is good for those dependent on it.

For many, the emotional situation of the authoritarian character outlined here is more an issue of the past than the present. When it is no longer observable, however, this is mainly due to the fact, that contemporary forms of economic production and socialization no longer need the repression of one's own autonomous powers,

and, instead, a new social character orientation has become dominant. In the 1940s, Fromm already recognized and described such an orientation as the 'marketing character'.

The marketing social character

The background for the formation of the marketing character (Fromm, 1947, pp. 67-107, 1976, pp. 147-154) is *industrial mass production* and modern-day *globalized cut-throat competition*. These, above all, are the reasons why in the market for goods and services, it is no longer the 'use value' but the 'exchange value' that determines the market, so that the question of marketing – the *sales strategy* – has become increasingly important. This requirement of successful economic management is reproduced in the basic strivings of the marketing social character, whereby humans likewise understand themselves as a *commodity* that must be sold successfully.

To put it in Fromm's words: „The character orientation which is rooted in the experience of oneself as a commodity and of one's value as exchange value I call the *marketing orientation*“ (Fromm, 1947, p. 68).

The requirement of successful marketing also determines the associated *psychodynamics*: The marketing-oriented person *acquires* 'marketable' personality attributes, competencies, forms of communication – independently of his actual being – and, if possible, *represses* those cognitive, emotional and imaginative powers, which do not promise success, because they are critical, difficult or negative.

This leads to an increasing *loss of experiencing oneself identically* on the basis of one's own mental powers, and of being *self-effective*. The marketing character is so alienated from himself that the authentic self-experience threatens to be lost. His self depends on the „echo“ and on success on the „market“ and is accompanied by *competition*, a permanent *increase in performance* and an intensified *training of acquired powers*.

The threatening loss of self is felt more unconsciously than consciously, as *losing*, as *inner emptiness* and as *listlessness* and *boredom*. In order not to become aware of this, above all, consuming and wanting to win become existentially important. As long as one is occupied with consuming and with competition and winning, one considers oneself to be safe from becoming a loser.

Let us ask more precisely which strivings and values are socially demanded and promoted, and which productive powers are to be repressed where possible.

- The most important thing of all and the highest value in the marketing orientation is certainly the

striving for success, which requires a great deal of ambition and willingness to work hard.

- The flexibilization of all production processes, but also the willingness to be highly *adaptable and flexible*, are central guiding values of a marketing-oriented economy and society.
- Even though everything revolves around how you present yourself and not who you are, success can only be ensured through *hard work*, which all too often leads to self-exploitation – and also to burnout.
- A competitive society knows only *winners and losers*. Winning is the motivational drive in every economic and sporting activity, but also in gaming and quiz shows.
- The decisive factor is how a person, a company, or an organization can present itself. The people concerned do not have to be *authentic* themselves, but their performance must be.
- Only *positive thinking, feeling and acting* are allowed if one wants to sell oneself or the organization well. Smiling is the order of the day everywhere.
- *Praise and appreciation* of the customer are the most successful marketing methods. They trigger a positive *echo* even if one feels the exact opposite.

Let us now ask which productive human strivings have to be *repressed* in the case of a dominant marketing social character:

- Those who are able to live from their own cognitive, emotional and imaginative forces experience themselves as powerful and largely independent of being appreciated by others. It is precisely this *authentic self-experience* that is at stake in the marketing orientation, especially with regard to sensing one's own *authentic feelings*.
- Of course, even marketing-oriented people still have an idea of who they are and what their weaknesses are; and yet, there is an increasing *identification with a salesman role*, in which *nothing negative may be perceived or expressed publicly* (and anger and hatred are then discharged in secrecy).
- The same holds true with regard to *negative self-perceptions*, such as fear, self-doubt, depressive moods or feelings of shame. Together with critical and *negative feelings about others*, they must be blocked out, so that a kind of rose-colored illusory world is created with each other that is less and less grounded in reality.
- The marketing-oriented person likes to decorate him- or herself with values and ideals in order to be attractive as a salesperson, company or organization. Their own convictions and the *values and ideals they actually live* no longer play

a role, because they would only lead to conflicts; however, this leads to a *loss of one's own sense of values*, which is then compensated for by „selling“ values to others.

The counterproductive consequences of repression and the socially patterned defects are also obvious in the case of the marketing character. However, they are not fully perceived as such, because the marketing character currently still dominates private and public life.

Conclusion: Erich Fromm's contribution to Critical Psychology

Erich Fromm's social character theory allows for the identification of socially patterned defects of human productivity, which are not perceived as counterproductive and pathogenic by those concerned and in the public awareness. These pathogenic impacts differ from social character to social character, so that a Critical Psychology has to identify the alienating and pathogenic impacts of each socially relevant character orientation separately in order to develop counter-strategies for the recovery of genuine human productivity.

Even if the marketing character presently still dominates in our parts of the world, it cannot be overlooked that the narcissistic social character described by Fromm as group narcissism (Fromm, 1964, pp. 78-94) is increasingly gaining importance. This is also true for the „Ego-oriented“ social character, as described by myself using Fromm's method, which wants to create everything anew and differently in a self-determined way without regard to natural and social constraints (Funk, 2005, 2011, 2019, pp. 129-145). The selective focus on the authoritarian and marketing character above was primarily intended to illustrate how differently their non-productive effects manifest.

With the authoritarian social character, we have an idea that the omnipresent logic of exercising dominance and being submissive was something natural, normal and reasonable for people at that time (and, to some extent, this is still the case for people in authoritarian systems today). The historical distance enables us to see clearly the pathogenic nature of this social character. Just think of the extent of violence used in education or by the state and its institutions of authority – or think of the domination exercised by men due to the combination of authoritarianism and patriarchy. Or think of the feelings of guilt that plagued those in the submissive role, and which were systematically reproduced by the dominators to keep people in dependency.

Due to the historical distance, there are also fewer problems in recognizing counter-strategies for the rediscovery of productive human character strivings and in generating the necessary acceptance for their implementation. Demystification of irrational authorities and disobeying them are strategies for recovering human productivity, as are the programmatic notions of „self-fulfillment“ or „empowerment“ in the personal sphere, or those of flat hierarchies and teamwork at the organizational level.

To implement these objectives of a Critical Psychology for the marketing character is much more difficult. The problem already begins with the awareness of the pathogenic effects, since competing, success striving and the need of the marketing character to win at all costs are regarded as completely normal and indispensable if one wants to be economically successful. The same holds true with regard to consumer behavior: After all, it would be stupid not to take advantage of a „special offer“. (That it is possible to do this differently has been demonstrated by the drugstore chain „dm“, which is widespread in Europe and which does not offer special discounts.)

How difficult humanly productive initiatives in the realm of economic activity and work organization are, can be observed, for example, in the struggle for survival of many cooperatively organized projects or, for example, in the implementation of an unconditional basic income. Nevertheless, initiatives such as the „Economy for the Common Good“ indicate that there is a growing awareness of the pathogenic effects of the marketing orientation and that human productivity must have priority over economic productivity.

If we take Erich Fromm's concept of social character seriously, then it is necessary to recognize the socially patterned defects and the pathology of what is considered to be normal in the current ways of economic activity, of working and of dealing with oneself and others. The humanistic concern of a Critical Psychology then is to confront these findings with the requirements of a truly human productivity and to find ways for its realization.

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