



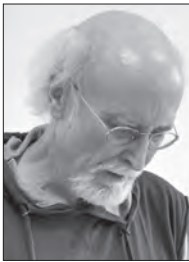
### III

## Towards A »Sane Society«

---

### Thoughts on Liberation On the Way to a Humane Society

Burkhard Bierhoff



**Abstract:** Fromm was one of the first psychoanalysts to deal with the crisis of civilization. His ideas about human nature, the social character and the social unconscious, the pathology of normalcy and the ideal of productivity are important. Fromm criticizes industrialism for its unrealizable promises of freedom and happiness, which correspond to an ideology of growth and progress. The satisfaction of »false« needs and desires does not

lead to human well-being.

**Keywords:** Erich Fromm, analytical social psychology, social character, human nature, habitus, subject theory, human productivity.

#### 1. Introduction

Fromm was one of the first psychoanalysts who dealt with the crisis of civilization in theory, bringing psychoanalysis and sociology together. Fromm's references and admonitions in this regard were announced to a larger audience



in 1976 in his book *To Have or To Be?* Furthermore, Fromm was one of the first critics who dealt with the topic of changing the way of life.

Fromm's criticism of industrialism bases on the assumption that industrial progress is ambivalent or two-faced, since it exposed promises of freedom and happiness with an unlimited satisfaction of wishes and needs. They are considered as »false« through the expanded production of goods. This ideology of growth and progress has been criticized because it is based on »false« needs and desires that are not capable of creating human well-being. This is a quasi-religious belief in progress. The »great promise« of industrialism has not been fulfilled. To the contrary, it has initiated a process of destruction of enormous proportions. The prosperity which was achieved in Western countries is measured only quantitatively. It also shows clearly conformist and compensatory tendencies on the subject level, which are leading to consumerism and up to shopping addiction—and thus causing new forms of alienation.

»Liberation« means overcoming the current crisis of civilization, which is especially related to the ecological problem, but also to poverty and alienation. Speaking of a »problem« trivializes it; ultimately, this question of civilizational existence is about life and death. The conditions of this question of survival are reaching into the deep structures of the psyche (social character and social unconsciousness). Until the ecological question is not accompanied by fear of existence no radical changes are to be expected. The approach of Fromm's analytical social psychology can fill such an attempt at liberation with content if it is extended by the dimension of the productive ideal.

Thinking about liberation requires reference theories that take the socially reproductive structures into account that condition the characteristics of the social character in the sense of conformity (conformist integration) and transcendent productivity (reflexive integration). In the following, we will reflect on the theoretical foundations that allow liberating action and thoughts to be grasped. Different approaches are possible, but my contribution prefers the theory of the social character and the theory of human relatedness opposed to other theories such as habitus theory and drive theory, since the author believes that they embody an appropriate, realistic view of man corresponding to human inventiveness.

The relationship between man and society is to be described with the help of an appropriate theory, whereby the destructive tendencies of civilization are captured with the ecological crisis. With the dynamic character concept is a tension of productive and conformist character orientations. How the productive human forces are rooted and energetically fed is due to the nature of man and in relation to the existing social structures, and how they are rooted in social characterology. Fromm's concept of man is not exhausted in the existing



social structures, but refers beyond them. Accordingly, for Fromm, man is not a blank sheet of paper on which culture only writes its text in socialization processes, but a part of an interactive process. Man is seen as an independent factor in the historical process.

If one considers liberation in the age of the ecological crisis and climate change, analytical social psychology is a reference theory which, with the potentiality of the human being, represents central hope-giving moments. This concern should be clearly elaborated in this article.

To create a human society, a theoretically blind approach has to be avoided. However, it is necessarily linked to conceptual efforts, namely to choose the possibilities and approaches that can be suitable to rethink life practice and to find (new) ways to transform it according to humane criteria. The theory must analyze the practice and examine the misery of what suffering means for people all over the world. This theory has to arrive at a social diagnosis that unveils violence and repression in life contexts. It also has to point out the factors that have to be fulfilled for a life worth living and it must stimulate the humane transformation of social structures and life practice. Especially, this theory must also be able to analyze the escalating crisis of our time without any glossing over, without illusions or ruthlessness. In the age of climate change and the ecological crisis, there is not much time left to redefine the course, because we may already have entered the exterministic stage of scientific-technical civilization. Industrialism reveals its destructive forces. However, we cannot seek destructiveness only in external conditions, but we are called upon to find the destructiveness within ourselves so that we can achieve a change in our relation to civilization. This article asks how Erich Fromm's suggestions can help us to find a way out of the crisis.

In the past decades, the concept of social character has been repeatedly received in sociology, but predominantly neglecting the dynamic concept of character.<sup>1</sup> The peculiarity of the social character concept lies in the fact that Fromm approaches the character structures behind the behavior patterns and actions. Fromm also analyzes them in their sociospecific typology. A fundamental sociological matter lies in the question of how the individuals adopt the standards and values of their reference groups to maintain their affiliation to society, to social milieus or classes. Fromm answers this question with his socio-psychoan-

---

1 In German socialization research, for example, the term social character has mostly been used without the dynamic understanding of character. H.G. Rolff (1973) understands social character as »a generalizing category that unifies the empirically found regular behaviors and attitudes of certain groups« (p. 42; own translation). Characterological categories are not used to describe social characters.



alytic concept of social character. The mostly known competing concept in this respect is the habitus theory of Pierre Bourdieu. This sociological theory fulfills the function of explaining how socially typical behavior patterns in class-specific variation arise at the behavioral level. Both concepts can be expected to explore the extent to which they are able to examine the deep social structures that determine the current crisis of Western civilization. A special expectation is to carry out the analysis taking account into the relationship between man and society, i.e. to ask how human behavior affects social life, the economy etc. experienced as external structures. It also has to be asked how, conversely, human behavior is influenced by these structures. The essential question is how the specific character structures underlying human behavior are generated.

## 2. The concept of analytical social psychology

Erich Fromm's concept is based on the combination of historical materialism and psychoanalysis. Fromm developed the fundamentals of this guiding concept for a long period in his work. He also dealt with the fundamental philosophical and sociological question of the relationship between man and society. One of Fromm's contributions to this question is that he has made the unconsciousness a relevant topic in the analysis of society by exploring the unconsciousness in society.

At the core of his social psychology is the concept of social character, with which Fromm has described the adaptation of man to social and other (e.g. geographical and climatic) environmental conditions in relation to the mode of production and the state of material productive forces. The ecological dimension of society is the ensemble of these conditions.

Besides the social character is the social unconscious, the central concept of Fromm's social psychology. The social unconscious consists of thoughts and feelings that are socially suppressed and are, as it were, subject to a ban on articulation. As long as these thoughts and feelings are socially suppressed and a subject to a ban on articulation, there is practically no hope of solving the ecological problem. They are difficult to express conceptually or remain purely intellectual, without any connection to affective knowledge. If these thoughts and feelings became socially known, they would severely disrupt the course of society. With his analytical social psychology Fromm asks about people's chances of developing their independence and productivity. He also asks how man can overcome alienation and oppression.

There is a special difficulty here. On the one hand the adaptation of man to society by means of the social character is necessary for anthropological



reasons, but on the other hand this adaptation can be excessive and restrict opportunities for freedom. The adjustment by social character serves, inter alia, to find a framework of orientation and to attain social affiliation. The force that lies in the nature of man needs to be shaped by the social character so that he can express himself in an existing society. The crucial question relates how men can achieve independence and productivity at the basis of this adaptation without missing their individuation in subordination and conformity. With this concept Fromm connects the expectation that man succeeds in overcoming alienation through a biophilic action that unfolds the love for the living in personality, human relationships and in the structure of society.

### 3. The approach of social character and the conception of human nature

At the center of analytical social psychology is the approach of social character, which Fromm has described, among other things, as the adaptation of man to the structures and functional conditions of society. However, this adjustment does not have to be mixed with the submission of man in totalitarian and authoritarian societies. This forced adaptation is inhuman, because it leads to character deformations and normo-pathological phenomena in the social world. In contrast, we must ask ourselves what a society really needs to develop human potential in interpersonal relationships and in the structures of life and work. The goal is to reduce alienation to a minimum.

A theory on the relationship between man and society must deal with the problem of how man and society can be coordinated, so that the psychological forces of man can be used as productive forces in society. However, this theory also has to work out the complementary perspective of how subjects are capable to change social reality in their interrelated actions and adapt them to their needs. It also has to show how they adapt the social reality in accordance to their own needs, especially true needs as opposed to false needs. For example, an American sociologist who lived in the turn of the 19th to the 20th century, named Lester Frank Ward, described this problem with the criticism of social Darwinism and with proposals for the melioration of society.

Fromm achieves both with his concept of social character: The description of the necessary integration and the achievement of getting an effective member of society that belongs to a social group or class. Fromm clearly sees that man cannot be adequately described as a social being only in the dimension of integration or subordination. In the dimension of productivity, his forces and activities are directed towards the transformation of society in the sense



of its humanization. With this attempt Fromm describes man as a productive being, who realizes his or her potential. Fromm combines the question of how men can understand themselves as the originators of social conditions and consciously shape them. If humans want to realize their potential, they must develop a productive relationship to themselves and other people and to their world. At this point, Fromm's conception of human nature with his specific image of man is important, to which I will refer now.

In his examination of Karl Marx's idea of man, Erich Fromm referred to the questions that were left out at Marx's time. These questions are the core issues for the subjectivity and anthropology in historical materialism. In his perception of Marx, Fromm dealt especially with Karl Marx's idea of man and alienation. Fromm worked out the idea of human nature in detail to find some standards for a change into the direction of a civilizational rescue dynamic. In this context, the dispute with Herbert Marcuse over the critical reading of psychoanalysis also has its place.

Erich Fromm does not regard man as a blank sheet of paper that can be used arbitrarily for any enslaving or liberal social purpose. His version of the relationship between man and society—in the light of humanistic moral concepts—regards man as a human being, based on development and self-realization (or individuation). People need to develop their potentials and therefore they need a society with relationships and social structures which support them in their development. This idea is the best case of a harmonized relationship between man and society instead of a contradictory model that stands in contrast to human possibilities. By this standard, all totalitarian and authoritarian social structures are inhuman and lead to deformations of the character and normo-pathologies of the social setting. In order to develop their possibilities, people need a society with relationships and social structures that promote them. All in all, humans are not only there for keeping the society working; the society has to support them in their development. The current social character, which represents the people of a society in relation to their different tasks in the context of their social situation and their value orientations, can be described by different levels of development in terms of human productivity. The existence of a humane society depends on social supporting structures.

#### **4. Social character or habitus— a comparison of two competing approaches**

The concept of social character is the key concept of Erich Fromm's analytical social psychology. On the one hand, Fromm's social character examines the



socially significant character structures that are typical for an epoch, so that the given necessities of society are fulfilled and the social structure is maintained. However, the social character is not a concept of order—i.e. not a concept that merely depicts the social order—rather, the concept extends to the processes of social change through friction between the established structures of order, the technical productive forces and the resulting new demands on the psychological structure that arises. The social character is a dynamic concept, which is based on the psychoanalytic character theory and it has been continued by Erich Fromm in relation to a historical-materialistic social theory. His social theory approach is also anchored in anthropology, which enables Fromm to understand humans as social beings who are not absorbed by the given social structures in their being. Rather, Fromm approaches the »nature« of man as an independent factor in the social process associated with human inventions and productivity. His anthropology incorporates the idea of a human potential for the possibility which is realized in the history of the species. Despite some ambiguities in his theory of productivity<sup>2</sup>, Fromm's comments on the productive ideal and the productive character structure are of considerable importance in so far as they both avoid an »over-socialized« view of man and an unsocialized view. The potential of liberation is formed in the tension between socially specific expectations of adaptation and productive responses of the individual to his life practice. The thoughts on liberation in my contribution are largely based on suggestions made by Erich Fromm on how a human society could be achieved. According to Erich Fromm's image of man, people are basically—albeit not under all social conditions—able to deal with repressive, restrictive living conditions. First of all, it has to be said, that the conducive conditions of these attempts at liberation are to be recognized as the social misery with its dangers and the global destruction process and to define a way of life that is in harmony with human development possibilities. On the theoretical level, this debate needs a coherent concept that encompasses repression as well as attempts at liberation. This concept can be found in Erich Fromm's analytical social psychology, which includes the social character, ideas about human nature, the social unconsciousness, the pathology of normalcy and the ideal of productivity. The practical attempts on liberation are addressed to concrete social problems, such as the environmental crisis with its ecological destruction on a global scale. The amount of potential for liberation is organized collectively in social movements; this is beneficial for the success of liberation.

2 See Michael Maccoby (1982). On the criticism of Fromm's concept of productivity see Burkhard Bierhoff (1993a), pp. 162–166.





A theory which competes with the concept of social character is the habitus theory of Pierre Bourdieu and Jean-Claude Passeron.<sup>3</sup> One of its central characteristics is to avoid both an »over-socialized« view of the individual and an objectivist view of society. Referring to Noam Chomsky, Bourdieu defines the habitus as a »system of internalized patterns,« through which »all typical thoughts, perceptions and actions of a culture—and only these« are generated (Bourdieu 1970, p. 143—here and in the following my own translations). »Habitus« can be understood as »a generative grammar of patterns of action« (ibid., p. 150). As generative patterns they form structures and can be internalized by the individuals. They do not need to be aware. How these patterns are acquired remains unclear in the habitus theory. There is no approach comparable to Fromm's concept of character that could explain how these patterns are transferred into the habitus. In Bourdieu and Passeron there are only two different »imprinting methods« that the authors refer to with regards to education. One of these imprinting methods produces »a habitus through the unconscious imprinting of principles, which are only expressed in the practical state in which they come into practice (implicit pedagogy).« The other one produces »the habitus through the methodically organized imprinting as such of formulated and even formalized principles (explicit pedagogy)« (Bourdieu & Passeron 1973, pp. 62 f.). Accordingly, educational sociology must examine the reproduction of structures »which are understood as a system of objective relationships that give the individual his or her relational characteristics, before and after his or her existence« (ibid., p. 91). The habitus has the function to intermediate the structures of the educational system with the class-specific structures of the way of life. The habitus is the result of such mediation and at the same time the basis for the reproduction of these structures. A special feature of this concept is the mediation between the individual and society which was made without a subject theory (as character theory is). In the habitus, life-historical experiences with the social structure are conveyed by means of symbolic violence—based on class situation—in such a way that the social necessities and imperatives prevail in individuals. Seen in this way, the habitus functions as a mediation category between the individual and the structure of class relationships.

The habitus provides objective barriers that define the range of behavior which is typically possible for the members of a society, class or reference group. According to the theory of social character, however, this behavior in the strict sense is not socially determined, because the specific combination of

---

3 On habitus theory in comparison to the concept of social character see Bierhoff 1993a, pp. 141–144.





unproductive and productive character orientations leaves room for inventive behavior. The advantage of the characterological approach over habitus theory seems to lie in the fact that the assessment of liberation potentials is possible. In contrast to Bourdieu's approach, Fromm's approach contains an explicit subject theory. In addition, the concept of social character is complemented by theories of the social unconscious, productivity and the »pathology of normalcy.«

Many traits and orientations of the social character cannot be reflected by people, since they are related not only to the personal unconscious, but also to the social unconscious. The continuous reproduction of the character structure, with the recourse to its elements, creates a certain unity that can only be questioned in a very limited self-reflexive way. How the socially predominant character orientations emerge and how they are reproduced stands in the background and remains unconscious to the actors. Pierre Bourdieu also assumes that the habitus arises through the unconscious imprinting of certain class specific principles. However, this can be understood as an elaborated concept of the social unconscious.

The habitus concept does not base on a dynamic idea of character or personality. Attention has to be drawn to the external characteristics, i.e. appearance and behavior from Fromm's point of view; a social-behaviorist or action-theoretical perspective, which corresponds to a typical action, must be overcome. Instead of this, Fromm is concerned about the forms of human relationships that result from the socially specific character structures. Overall, according to Fromm the difference between behavior and character is very important (cf. Fromm 1962a, pp. 71–74). The habitus concept does not include any of these criteria. Accordingly, it can hardly be used as a relevant basis for a conceivable liberation from the performative structures of the class situation. Because of this I prefer Fromm's approach to social character and the productive ideal.

## **5. Drive heuristics or human relations— the critical potential of anthropology in a critical theory of society**

The attempt to contribute to the liberation of man with a specific »expansive« theory requires a theoretical fixed point. From this point it is possible to determine the anthropological foundations in which the critical resistance potential of man against repressive social structures can be found. The controversy between Herbert Marcuse and Erich Fromm in the 1950s—which went down to the history of critical theory as a dispute against culturalism and revisionism—is very instructive at this point, since the theoretical approach is about a fundamental consensus despite all the differences. For their theoretical



reflections on liberation, both authors need a hopeful theoretical dimension that makes this resistance to repressive forms of socialization plausible and substantiate it empirically.

After his separation from the *Institute for Social Research* in 1939, Erich Fromm had a wish for oblivion; his formerly central role in the Institute as the head of the social-psychological department and research director was pushed in the background and even denied in the official descriptions of the Institute. The dispute had a historical dimension in the development of critical theory, where the philosophical or therapeutic reading of psychoanalysis was concerned. This concealed also the personal animosities of the exponents. After all, it was Erich Fromm and Herbert Marcuse who represented this debate, which was already made up in their personalities and in the differences between Fromm and the other members of the *Institute for Social Research*.

In the 1950s, the journal *Dissent* published a basic paradigmatic discussion between Herbert Marcuse (1955a) and Erich Fromm (1955b). This discussion can be reduced to this question: Where can we find the critical and resistant potentials in humans? This question is also directed against repressive socialization. The tradition of the critical theory of the Frankfurt School leads to the necessity of rebellion against repressive forms of socialization. This resistance can be justified with the help of the drive heuristics (so Herbert Marcuse). Otherwise, it can also be found in an anthropological approach (according to Erich Fromm), which emphasizes the potential of human nature. Both opponents give a similar solution, which is anchored in the drive structure (Marcuse) or in nature of man (Fromm).<sup>4</sup>

As I described in the dispute between Erich Fromm and Herbert Marcuse, Marcuse is concerned with the hopeful function of drive theory. The drive theory says in essence that making real freedom is possible with the development of libidinal reason. However, the question arises to the point, if the western concept of reason is sufficiently in this sense or not. Fromm rejected the biologism of the Freudian drive theory and presented a functionally equivalent theory that refers to the nature of man. Both concepts—the drive theory of Marcuse and the anthropology of Fromm—are anchored in resistance forces that can articulate themselves in course of history. They also show some possibilities for living humanity and humanization in forms of society and interaction.

Fromm's description of human nature clearly shows that man can be integrated to a high degree into almost every form of society. However, if certain limits of repression are crossed, man can oppose the de-individualization and alienation which is taking place and fight against the destructive effects.

---

4 For the positions of Marcuse and Fromm see Bierhoff 1993a, pp. 85–108.



In the course of an epoch the real potential is formed in individuals. The transformational forces arise from their character-orientations, their habitus or the drive structure.

The task of a critical theory is to find out which possibilities can be developed in humans—either in the sense of a resisting refusal (cf. Marcuse) or in the sense of productive personality development (according to Fromm). In principle, it is unpredictable how men can process their experiences and what conclusions they draw from them. They can think over terms which already exist or supposedly autonomously express their disappointment and their lack of agreement with social developments in a powerless protest. In any case, it is difficult to predict how human beings will behave normally under conditions of alienation and »pathology of normalcy.« Integration can be associated with high psychological costs for the individual and his happiness. Today there are numbers of changing tendencies, as Jeremy Rifkin (2010) and Lloyd deMause (2002) have observed in very different ways.

The debate between Herbert Marcuse and Erich Fromm on revisionist culturalism is usually seen as a paradigmatic document for differences in the theoretical status of psychoanalysis in a critical theory of society. Typical for this dispute is that we cannot decide which is the »better« argument. On the one hand, the opponents are relatively close in their positions, since they share a critical understanding of science from their origins in the *Institute for Social Research*. On the other hand, this dispute is ultimately about two competing positions to theoretically justify the human potential for resistance against social repression. Both refer to psychoanalysis, although they use different readings (philosophical versus clinical-theoretical reading). They both conclude that such a potential can be found in the drive structure (Marcuse) or in the »nature« of man (Fromm). Without following the chains of argument here in detail, Marcuse concludes that the *libidinal reason* constitutes this potential for resistance, while Fromm recognizes such a potential in *human relatedness* on the basis of love and reason. Without striving for a consensus, both authors arrive at the theoretical solutions of their common basic problem, which are equally important and contain a counterpoint against repressive forms of socialization. If one immanently accepts the respective arguments and constructions, one will find a comprehensible solution for both, which does not mean surrendering to the repressive social system.

The late debate between Fromm and Marcuse, which should have been held at the *Institute for Social Research* as early as the mid-1930s, showed from both positions, which were already close together, that a critical examination of real developments of the epoch is possible, which points out a comparable thrust against repression and alienation. These are the main differences in



the anthropological concept, which in Marcuse's case referred to the drive structure and in Fromm's case contained a productive potential founded in nature. In my opinion, the following match is the most important one. Both positions recognized the central importance of the renewal of anthropological theory to make a basis for a changed image of man from which impulses for liberating actions can emanate. A detailed comparison of the positions of both opponents led me to the conclusion that the differences were overvalued and that both positions were functionally of equal importance with regards to the theory-immanent significance of the respective reasons.

This result is also supported by the later rapprochement of the positions of Fromm and Marcuse. Fromm commented on *An Essay on Liberation* (Marcuse 1969), which followed Marcuse's *Eros and Civilization* (1955b) and *The One-Dimensional Man* (1964), as a change of position that contained neither pessimism nor nihilism, but it was humanistic in its essence. In his late lectures, Marcuse approached the character concept and referred to the *destructive character* associated with ecological destruction.<sup>5</sup> From today's view it seems promising to start exactly where Fromm and Marcuse get along with each other. At this point we have to ask to which statements and findings, a theory formation and social analysis, are related to today's changed and aggravated reality with its social and ecological problems, which consequently follows a *rescue dynamic*, as Rudolf Bahro (1994) has called the new theoretical basis directed against a logic of exterminism.

This dynamic of rescue can refer to both Fromm and Marcuse. Both opponents tried to form an appropriate social theory that can serve as a basis for liberation. In theory, there are clear differences, which have been established in the therapeutic as opposed to the philosophical reading of psychoanalysis. What they have in common, in fact, is that they argue from a similar perspective, namely anthropology, in order to support the liberating forces of man against repressive structures. From a socio-theoretical point of view, Fromm's concept of the social character seems to be more far-reaching, because the social character is, to a certain degree, the »transition point« from social structures into psychological structures. Even if one associates Marcuse's drive

---

5 Herbert Marcuse defines radical change »as a change [...] also in individual consciousness« (1979, p. 30). According to Marcuse, today's society is determined by a destructive character structure. He regards institutionalized destruction as the background for the reproduction of destructiveness in the individual character (cf. *ibid.*). For him, the alternative is a »radical character structure,« which he describes as the predominance of life instincts over the socially organized death instinct (*ibid.*, p. 32). With these statements, Marcuse takes a position that has clearly come closer to his former opponent Erich Fromm.



structure with a potential to resist repressive forms of socialization, Fromm's social character theory appears to be more far-reaching.

## 6. Dimensions of liberation and human productivity

The liberation attempt goes on from the attempts of the early critical theory to bring more »reason« into society and to establish a »theory of the course of the epoch,« as Horkheimer called the purpose of building a critical theory. It is a feature of this theory to reduce poverty and alienation. It aims to find out how the forces of social destruction prevent a »sane« society. It also empowers the subjects to circumvent the disciplining instead of submitting themselves to authorities, to overcome social injustice and to reduce alienation. Fromm was involved in this social experiment as a member of the *Institute for Social Research* until the end of the 1930s. Today, the processes of social formation in neoliberalism have significantly accelerated and led to the paralysis of the subjects as collective actors, partly by prescribing mass consumption as a means of compensation. This is, in a manner of speaking, the part of the theory that continues the development of capitalist society and describes the peculiarities of rulership. The classical working society, which is characterized by industrial work and services, has been replaced by the knowledge-based society, which develops new forms of work. Since the late 1980s, changes in the structure and function of work have been clearly discernible and the concept of work has significantly changed (cf. Bierhoff, 1993b, 2013). Particularly forms of work outside wage labor have come to the fore which includes certain non-alienated forms of human relation, whose value goes beyond the reproduction of labor, because they promote a sphere of human relationship. This sphere is characterized less by alienation than by authenticity. Certain forms of educational work in the context of the »modernist psycho-class« (Lloyd deMause) are an example beyond the reproductive function, insofar as they apparently determine their own dynamics.

In contrast, in his theory of normo-pathology Fromm also outlined hidden disciplining, which effectively captures people in existing structures and integrates them in a repressive manner into the existing system, especially of everyday consumption.

Today, the hidden disciplining has reduced the emphatic concept of freedom. This takes place through the idea that the new freedom is the freedom of consumption. In the consumerist way of life, which has globalized and spread out all over the world, humans hurt other humans who are living now or in the future. Furthermore, they hurt also themselves. The reason for this is that



man deprives himself of the possible opportunities of development. This disciplining, which seems not to be violent at first glimpse, is based on the subjects' self-humiliation and disempowerment. This term was described by Fromm (1955a) in his theory of an »insane society« as the »pathology of normalcy.« This pathology is difficult for the individual to recognize, because the disciplining influences are reaching into the deep structure of drives and passions and establish a general lack of happiness, which in a state of alienation is accepted by the subjects as a normal state. This delusion must be reversed in sane social structures in which people can develop. From the perspective of Erich Fromm, the question is how the social character can change in a productive direction.

In the current development, it appears precarious that the present epoch seems to be dominated by necrophilous structures and tendencies alloyed with industrialism and negating human progress. The unleashed material productive forces are leading to an increasing destruction of nature.

Essential theoretical contributions are given with the concept of social character, which Fromm also refers to its productive functions. On this point, it should be noted that Fromm defines the concept of productivity in very different ways, especially from an inherent productivity (for example in relation to the social »productive forces«) to a system-transcending productivity (which Fromm described with his »productive ideal«). The concept of social character is also related to new character types which are appearing in the development of society, for example an »ego-oriented character« (Funk 2005) or the »post-industrial character« (Bierhoff 1993b).

Whether this concept of »post-industrialism« is useful depends on the point of view. The present society is still based on industrialism, but industrial work declines due to automation processes and new accents with new qualities. This had changed the manifestations of industrialism and had also caused consequences on the subjects and their character structures. People have emerged in the sequence of steps from an agricultural society to an industrial society and further to a service society and knowledge-based society. The new social character does not have to describe the release of traditional work only as a loss. Furthermore, it is an opportunity for new activities beyond the wearing and alienating work associated with participation in the community and forms of relation in social relationships.

To investigate the changes in social character, complementary concepts such as Pierre Bourdieu's habitus concept and Alfred Lorenzer's theory of forms of interaction can be used.

In addition to the habitus concept, Alfred Lorenzer's theory of forms of interaction, which is based on his materialistic theory of socialization, also has to be taken into account. This theory does not contradict Fromm's theory



of social character. This theory is built on the view of a sociality of drives. As can be seen, Freud's drive theory has been revised here in a similar way as in position of Fromm, too. Unfortunately, Lorenzer has not been received in American socialization theory because it is hard to find any English contributions or translations of his work. However, some of his work has been translated into Spanish and one of his works has also been translated into Croatian. A short insight gives the elaboration of a former student (cf. Schaffrik 2002).

Thinking about liberation, at the basis of Fromm's work, leads to a closer look at the scientific concept of Erich Fromm. Throughout his life, Fromm declared his support for a humanist socialism. The characteristic feature of his theories is the double reference to Marx *and* Freud, whereby he has further developed historical materialism, which takes psychoanalytic dimensions of character and the social unconscious into account (cf. Fromm 1962a). In the process, a new theoretical structure has emerged that Fromm has described already in the 1930s as analytical social psychology. This is an extended scientific model that goes beyond description and explanation and contains normative orientations of an ethical nature. In the sense of a philosophy of practice, it has also provided ideas for shaping life. In this way scientific and ideological aspects are combined, which are reflexively and ideologically self-controlled, but nevertheless contain a new expansive type of scientific research practice. This type rather falls outside the scope in the mainstream of science and belongs to the unwanted or »forbidden worlds« in the sense of Alvin W. Gouldner. If one considers Erich Fromm as a sociologist, he is close to »sociological thinking« (Charles Wright Mills) or »reflective sociology« (Alvin Gouldner). In the scientific landscape of the 20th century, however, Fromm stood up for himself without founding his own school. With his complete writings Fromm has left essential impulses for theoretical work.

## 7. Conclusion

Fromm left us a legacy for a radical science of man with his revised psychoanalysis which is based on a theory of human relatedness. It includes the view of human nature in terms of biophilia and productivity, the continuation of Karl Marx's theory of alienation, and the integration of psychoanalysis and Marxism.

In theory formation, the reflection on liberation is promoted by a series of positions. For example, in the social theory, it starts with the relationship between man and society. In the sense of a critical anthropology, which establishes an idea of man, who finds himself in course of his development in a reflexive distance from the social structure than to evaluate it in respect of





repressive and liberating moments. Attempts at liberation refer both to the theoretical criticism of the appropriation of people by a repressive social structure and to reflections on how prevailing character orientations can be combined with the productive potential in humans. Here, only Fromm's concept of the social character offers a positive tension between productivity and conformism.

Erich Fromm's thoughts are rich and forward-looking. In detail, his approach requires a slight continuation. In addition to some fundamental considerations of analytical social psychology, the question arises of which social trends are today supporting liberation from obviously hostile structures. Moreover, the considerations also lead to a break with the unconscious destructive development dynamics of this civilization. Changes in lifestyle, emerging new lifestyles, subversive protest activities, new forms of contacts and relationships, and developments in the areas of love and empathic care must be included, too. Finally, socioeconomic and cultural developments in the labor society and the knowledge-based society also have to be seen, as they also lead to new forms of income outside the labor market and gainful employment.

With this conclusion I would like to draw attention to the »thoughts on liberation,« which are concerning especially the environment and the way of life and at the same time require a productive and sustainable lifestyle.

A possible solution to the crisis of civilization needs a bundle of different approaches, ranging from the development of a convivial technique, through the distribution of wealth, to a change in the consumerist lifestyle. The solution is also linked to the question of how relationships and social structures can be created to promote the development potential of all members of society against social erosion processes and reduce alienation to a minimum. Only when life in harmony with nature and social well-being in an empathic civilization becomes possible, human energies can increasingly be directed towards communitarian and aesthetic goals and achieve quality of life through playful action and targeted activities. This will only be possible if the unconscious in society is transformed into a conscious personal and social way of life. Here, however, there is the persistent difficulty that resistance to insight is so great that the unconscious structures remain unappropriated. The task remains to develop thoughts and concepts on how to make unconscious structures conscious.

The question of civilizational survival is about life and death. Until the ecological question is still not accompanied by existential fear, no radical changes are to be expected. Intellectual knowledge is often not related to affective insights. The so-called »ecological problem« stands for barriers to feeling and acting responsibly and is an example of social unconsciousness.

There is still a gap between environmental knowledge and environmentally responsible behavior. This can be explained by social repressions which



are leading to cultural self-evidences that are pathological because they are associated with destructive consequences for humans and nature. In addition, there is helplessness and a lack of love of life as well as false needs, the satisfaction of which hurts people's integrity and deprives them of their chances of development. While certain crisis tendencies can be identified at the theoretical level, the practical implementation of the apparently not urgent insights is missing, so that the necessary consequences are not drawn. Obviously, it is difficult to arrive at a meaningful understanding in everyday life with the corresponding behaviors determined by reason and love. Even if people do not react reflexively to social and economic structures but use them actively, ambiguous structures remain in the subject and in the social structure, which in extreme cases form a repressive framework from which it is difficult to break out. The economy with the consumer sector largely follows premises that adhere to destructive mass production and produce a destructive surplus. Through consumption and reproductive activities in everyday life, people are bound to socio-economic structures that they can hardly oppose. The alternatives of life are determined particularly by the economic structures that people need as consumers, even if resources are exhausted and life is destroyed. The social character transforms the social and economic demands and necessities into passions and psychological needs that people accept as their own. However, since the process of destruction is largely irreversible, a structural and psychosocial rescue logic must be promoted that transforms industrialism and leads to a sustainable way of life that is acceptable to the earth. These changes call into question the social character of the past, but ultimately lead to a changed social character whose task is to ensure the survival of people belonging to a special society, class or reference group.

The unconsciousness in society must be brought back into the conscious availability of man—to overcome alienation. Without getting in contact with this unconsciousness, a deep insight into the civilizational crisis is not possible. To get in touch with the social unconscious, changes in the social character are indispensable. Today, the new social necessities not only have to ensure the survival not only of the members of a society, but of the human species as a whole. At the same time they stand against the economic premises and commandments that are destructive and involve people in perceived functional needs such as quantitative economic growth and mass consumption. In the struggle between the life instincts and the socially organized death instinct, a new way of life must emerge which, in the sense of Fromm, increasingly leaves the having mode behind and is attracted to an authentic being. This being corresponds to a genuine authentic way of life that is oriented towards one's own self and is determined by voluntary simplicity. We live too comfortably, we



have established ourselves in the lifestyle of consumerist abundance with its conveniences. We do not want to give up the satisfaction of many compensatory needs and at the same time we accept that by our daily actions we further stimulate the deadly spiral of civilizational destruction, do not leave it out of fear and helplessness, but adhere to the compensatory satisfaction of needs. Erich Fromm has shown how one can get in touch with one's deeper layers in steps from having to being in a conceptual and exemplary way, combined with concrete suggestions for shaping one's life (Fromm 1989a).

The only appropriate response to the ecological crisis would be fear as an emotional response to the expected consequences which we are feeling today. There is still a long way to go to reduce the social destructiveness that threatens life on our planet. These endangerments can only be overcome by a characteristic attitude determined by human productivity and biophilia, and at the same time practicing realism without illusions that avoids cultural pessimism and technophobia.

The critical theorist has to pay a special attention to the life-saving tendencies and movements, which are currently forming and are still partly hidden. The liberating potentials and tendencies in technological-civilizing development, which influence the way of life and working, are to be reevaluated. A special aspect is dedicated to the change of nature and environment. On the one hand, the exploitation is increasing and natural resources are being destroyed; on the other hand there is an increasing alienation of Western civilization from nature.

In this context the distinction between *capitalist* and *authentic* ecology is particularly useful (cf. Marcuse 1972). Of fundamental importance is the approach to character, whereby people and structures are not strictly separated, but they are considered as an interacting phenomenon. Furthermore, the emphasis on the anthropological structure, which is a structure that changes in the social process, leads to the emergence of new human potential and to new accents in the definition of man.

## References

- Bahro, Rudolf (1994): *Avoiding Social and Ecological Disaster. The Politics of World Transformation*. Bath, UK (Gateway Books).
- Bourdieu, Pierre (1970): *Zur Soziologie der symbolischen Formen*, Frankfurt a.M. (Suhrkamp).
- Bourdieu, Pierre; Passeron, Jean-Claude (1973): *Grundlagen einer Theorie der symbolischen Gewalt*, Frankfurt a.M. (Suhrkamp).



- Bierhoff, Burkhard (1993a): *Erich Fromm. Analytische Sozialpsychologie und visionäre Soziologie*. Wiesbaden (Westdeutscher Verlag).
- (1993b): »Zum Zusammenhang von Arbeit, Charakter und Erziehung,« in: *Wissenschaft vom Menschen—Science of Man*. Jahrbuch der Internationalen Erich-Fromm-Gesellschaft, Münster (LIT Verlag), Vol. 4 (1993): Arbeit—Entfremdung—Charakter, pp. 29–62.—URL: [opus4.kobv.de/opus4-Fromm/files/5608/Bierhoff\\_B\\_1993a.pdf](http://opus4.kobv.de/opus4-Fromm/files/5608/Bierhoff_B_1993a.pdf) —[Last access: September 16th, 2018].
- (2013): »Arbeit im Wandel. Zur Begründung eines bedingungslosen Grundeinkommens,« in: H. Johach and B. Bierhoff (Eds.), *Humanismus in der Postmoderne. Rainer Funk zum 70. Geburtstag*, Pfungstadt (Selbstverlag) 2013, pp. 259–283.
- deMause, Lloyd (2002): *The Emotional Life of Nations*. New York (Karnac).—URL: [psychohistory.com/books/the-emotional-life-of-nations/](http://psychohistory.com/books/the-emotional-life-of-nations/).—[Last access: September 16th, 2018].
- Fromm, Erich: (1955a): *The Sane Society*, New York (Rinehart and Winston).
- (1955b): »The Human Implications of Instinctivistic ›Radicalism,« in: *Dissent*, New York, Fall 1955, pp. 342–349.
- (1962a): *Beyond the Chains of Illusion. My Encounter with Marx and Freud*, New York (Simon and Schuster)].
- (1976a): *To Have Or to Be?*, New York (Harper and Row).
- (1989a): *The Art of Being*, London (Constable Robinson) 1993.
- Funk, Rainer (2005): *Ich und Wir. Psychoanalyse des postmodernen Menschen*, München (dtv).
- Gouldner, Alvin W. (1970): *The Coming Crisis of Western Sociology*, New York (Avon Books).
- Maccoby, Michael (1982): »Social Character vs. The Productive Ideal. The Contribution and Contradiction in Fromm’s View of Man,« in: *Praxis International*, pp. 70–83.
- Marcuse, Herbert (1955a): »The Social Implications of Freudian ›Revisionism,« in: *Dissent*. New York, Summer 1955, pp. 221–240.
- (1955b): *Eros and Civilization*, Boston (Beacon Press).
- (1964): *The One-Dimensional Man*, Boston (Beacon Press).
- (1969): *An Essay on Liberation*, Boston (Beacon Press).—URL: [www.marxists.org/reference/archive/marcuse/works/1969/essay-liberation.htm](http://www.marxists.org/reference/archive/marcuse/works/1969/essay-liberation.htm) [Last access: September 16th, 2018].
- (1972): »Ecology and Revolution,« in: *Liberation*, Vol. 16 (September 1972), pp. 10–12.
- (1979): »Ecology and the Critique of Modern Society,« in: *Capitalism Nature Socialism*, Vol. 3, No. 3 1992. pp. 29–38.—URL: [www.marcuse.org/herbert/pubs/posthumous/79MarcuseEcologyCritiqueModernSociety1992CapNatSoc.pdf](http://www.marcuse.org/herbert/pubs/posthumous/79MarcuseEcologyCritiqueModernSociety1992CapNatSoc.pdf).—[Last access: September 16th, 2018].
- Mills, Charles Wright (1959): *The Sociological Imagination*, New York (Oxford University Press).
- Rifkin, Jeremy (2010): *The Empathic Civilization. The Race to Global Consciousness*



in a World in Crisis, New York (Jeremy P. Tarcher).

Rolff, Hans-Günter (1973): Sozialisation und Auslese durch die Schule, 6th Ed., Heidelberg (Quelle & Meyer).

Schaffrik, Tobias (2002): The Work of Alfred Lorenzer. An Introduction—URL: [bidok.uibk.ac.at/library/schaffrik-lorenzer-work-e.html](http://bidok.uibk.ac.at/library/schaffrik-lorenzer-work-e.html)—[Last access: September 16th, 2018].

Copyright © 2019 by

**Professor Dr. Burkhard Bierhoff**, Brandenburgische TU Cottbus, D-03048 Cottbus;

E-Mail: [bmbierhoff@gmail.com](mailto:bmbierhoff@gmail.com)