What Does »Productive Orientation« Mean According to Erich Fromm?

Rainer Funk

Aside from the presentation of the four social characters towards the end of the paper, this article has already been published in German under the title »Was heißt ›produktive Orientierung‹ bei Erich Fromm?« in *Fromm Forum* (German edition), Tübingen (self-published), No. 7 (2003), pp. 14-27. A Spanish translation, entitled »La creatividad según Erich Fromm« was published 2011 with DEMAC Publisher in Mexico. – Quotations from the works of Erich Fromm are given without the author's name and with the abbreviation of the publication (year of first publication).

Most of those involved in Erich Fromm's character theory experience that understanding the different non-productive character orientations (receptive, exploitative, authoritarian, hoarding, conformist, marketing, narcissistic, necrophilous, etc. – cf. Funk 1995; 2019, pp. 95-143) is easier than understanding the meaning of productive character orientation. On the one hand, this has to do with the consumerist »zeitgeist« of our days, for which only what is real and has an effect goes into the human being and is acquired by the human being, but not what one brings out of oneself. But this is exactly what characterizes Fromm's psychoanalytic understanding of »productivity« and »productive orientation«: »Productive orientation« always means that the human being »brings forth« (»pro-ducere«) something from oneself in one's thinking, feeling, and acting, and thus that one's behavior is *oriented* toward bringing forth, toward *producing* what is in the human being.

On the other hand, the more difficult understanding of productive orientation has to do with a strongly widespread understanding of empirical and scientific matters that only allows the measurable to be taken into account. Where only the measurable counts, one may only be interested in the behavioral *expressions*, but not in the behaving subject. The subject behaves equivocally: today like this, tomorrow like that; in one situation indignant and demanding, in another friendly and obliging; sometimes it is only aggressive because it wants to save its life, sometimes it shows a permanent readiness to hurt others.

Nevertheless, whoever is interested in the behaving subject in view of the multifaceted behavior cannot avoid wanting to understand and interpret what is going on in this subject. But this is only possible if one is related to this subject and if one can perceive in oneself what is noticeable in the process. A scholarly interest that also wants to recognize the behaving subject needs a sense of the empirical that extends that of the measurable to that of »experience« and therefore recognizes one's own sensing and experiencing (the »subjectivity«) as something indispensable for scientific knowledge (»objectivity«).

Both the consumerist zeitgeist and a concept of science that is shortened to the measurable make it difficult for us to understand productive orientation, except when we have access to it in our own experience and practice. The existence, strength and effectiveness of productive orientation is generally comprehensible only to those who practice it (at least to some extent) and thereby experience its existence, strength and effectiveness. Or to put it a bit more (self)critically: The fact that we have more difficulties in understanding productive orientation than in understanding non-productive orientations also has to do with the fact that we are more or less strongly determined by non-productive character orientations.

To Clarify the Terms

Before attempting to show what »productive orientation« means according to Fromm, it is helpful to recall the two levels on which the concept of character *orientation* (or character *structure*) is used by Fromm. One level is an *ideal-typical description* of different character orientations. Here, character *orientation* refers to that impulsive force – what Sigmund Freud captured with the term »drive« – or basic passion that seeks to express itself in a person's character *traits* and concrete behaviors. Such orientations of character as ideal-typically impulses are, on the one hand, the productive character orientation and, on the other hand, the non-productive character orientations caused by personal circumstances and/or social interests. In fact, these ideal types never exist in a pure state. »There is no person whose orientation is entirely productive, and no one who is completely lacking in productiveness. But the respective weight of the productive and the non-productive orientations in each person's character structure varies and determines the *quality* of the non-productive orientations.« (1947a, p. 78.) Hence, the strength of productive orientation is also crucial in any kind of characterological diagnoses and change efforts. Exactly here, however, is the point of transition from the descriptive to the dynamic understanding of character orientation.

The other level on which Fromm speaks of character orientation denotes the *dynamics* at work in a character *orientation*. Since the basic question of every living being, as will be shown, is growth or decay, integration or disintegration, the dynamics of a character orientation can be qualified as either/or. The decisive point is in which direction a human being is pushed by his inner and outer impulses: either in the direction of integration or in the direction of disintegration. There is no third (apart from the theoretical possibility that both dynamics can be in equilibrium for a moment – as in the case of tug-of-war). In general, either one or the other direction is decisive, although this does not mean that in concrete experience the individual does not perceive both productive and non-productive character orientations in oneself. Nevertheless, it is decisive where one is attracted or driven to.

In the course of his scientific work, Fromm used various pairs of terms to characterize the integrating or disintegrating dynamics, with »productive« and »non-productive« being the pair which – first presented in detail in *Man for Himself* in 1947 – has asserted itself most strongly in his writings and is therefore also preferred in the reception of Fromm's character theory. The other main pairs of terms used to qualify the dynamics of character orientations are: »biophilic« and »necrophilic,« »syndrome of growth« and »syndrome of decay« (both first elaborated in 1964 in *The Heart of Man*), and »orientation toward having« and »orientation toward being« (described in detail in 1976 in *To Have or To Be?*).

Since Fromm himself made only a rudimentary attempt at a systematic presentation of his understanding of productive (and non-productive) character orientation, it is first necessary to trace his attempts at definition as he tried to grasp the dynamics of productive orientation. In addition, the meaning of productive orientation can also be traced in his psychoanalytic understanding of the dynamics of non-productivity, as it becomes evident in the concept of »alienation« in the early 1950s.

Erich Fromm's Psychodynamic Understanding of »Productivity« and »Productive Orientation«

A first attempt to conceptualize productivity was made by Fromm in his book *Escape from Freedom* (1941a) with the concept of *spontaneity*. In this book, Fromm traces the emergence of individuality and an individual self in the modern era, which for the first time in history gives man the possibility to live on his own initiative (*sua sponte*) and to relate to reality with the help of this individual self. However, Fromm also emphasizes in this book the fear of being

alone and detached that comes with this freedom of the individual and the danger that people secondarily place themselves back into dependencies and bonds (especially authoritarian dependency). The human being must – figuratively speaking – cut the umbilical cord in areas where he is dependent on external entities so that the strength of his self can grow, which only succeeds if he simultaneously activates his own physical, mental and spiritual powers. Productivity is therefore more closely conceived in *Escape from Freedom* as spontaneous activity, as activity of one's own initiative. »*For the self is as strong as it is active.*« (1941a, p. 260.)

Six years later, in his book *Man for Himself*, Fromm introduces his concept of productive orientation (1947a, pp. 82-107) and gives the definition, »Productiveness is man's realization of the potentialities characteristic of him, the use of his powers« (p. 87). This definition still seems to me to be the most important one, especially in a time when media technology makes people believe at every turn that the decisive possibilities for a meaningful life do not lie in the human being, but outside of him, and that they do not have to be brought forth from his own capacities, but are to be appropriated or consumed.

In connection with pointing out the productive orientation in *Man for Himself*, Fromm also comes to speak of an entirely current prerequisite for productivity, namely the ability to perceive *actuality both reproductively and generatively*. »Re-productively« means by »perceiving actuality in the same fashion as a film makes a literal record of things photographed«; »generatively« means »by conceiving it, by enlivening and re-creating this new material through the spontaneous activity of one's own mental and emotional powers« (1947a, p. 88). Especially in the context of the present discussion of constructivism and postmodernism, which wants to let only the generative ability be valid, Fromm sees here the presence of both capacities as »a precondition for productiveness; they are opposite poles whose interaction is the dynamic source of productiveness« (Ibid, p. 91).

In connection with the introduction of a psychoanalytic-clinical concept of man's alienation from his own powers (see below) and the demonstration of independent psychological needs (for relatedness, for a sense of identity, etc.) in his book *The Sane Society* (1955a), Fromm defines productivity as *mental health and mature development*. Fromm defines those psychic needs, which are proven in all human beings and which have been satisfied in all cultures and at all times, as »existential« or simply »psychic« or »human« needs. These must be satisfied, but they can be satisfied in a variety of ways and, depending on the way in which they are satisfied, contribute to the achievement or failure of human development and its relatedness to actuality. Mental health and mature development can thus be defined as the effects of a productive orientation

regarding the ways of satisfying mental needs: »Mental health is characterized by the ability to love and to create [need for relatedness], by the emergence from the incestuous ties to family and nature [need for rootedness], by a sense of identity based on one's experience of self as the subject and agent of one's powers [need for a sense of identity], by the grasp of reality inside and outside of ourselves, that is, by the development of objectivity and reason« [need for a frame of orientation and an object for devotion] (1955a, p. 203).

The discovery of necrophilia, the attraction to the dead and lifeless, as an independent character orientation in the early 1960s motivated Fromm to characterize productivity as a biophilic orientation in his 1964 book *The Heart of Man*. In the face of necrophilic destructiveness, which (as suicidal terrorism shows) can override even the survival drive, Fromm asks about the inherent dynamics of living systems and recognizes that, beyond the survival drive, they have a tendency toward integration and unification. »Unification and integrated growth are characteristic of all life processes, not only as far as cells are concerned, but also with regard to feeling and thinking« (1964a, p. 46.). It is precisely this peculiarity that Fromm calls »biophilia« and defines: »The full unfolding of biophilia is to be found in the productive orientation. The person who fully loves life is attracted by the process of life and growth in all spheres« (Ibid., pp. 46 f.).

With the introduction of the alternative »biophilia vs. necrophilia,« Fromm's attention to the »primary potentiality« or »tendency« of all life, namely to want to unfold and grow, intensifies; indeed, he sets out to substantiate such a view »that man has an immanent goal« (1973a, pp. 290 f.). Already in *The Heart of Man* he speaks of a life-promoting syndrome, the syndrome of growth, which he contrasts with a syndrome of decay (1964a, p. 11). Finally, in *The Anatomy of Human Destructiveness* he tries to underpin his view with neurophysiological and other findings.

Humans »can also be defined as a *being in active search of his optimal development,* even though this search must often fail because external conditions are too unfavorable« (1973a, p. 286). That intrinsic active search for optimal development can be evidenced, according to Fromm, in the analysis of neuronal activity and the function of activating stimuli. »Activating stimuli« evoke »a productive response« (Ibid., p. 270). In the posthumous paper »Is Man Lazy by Nature?« from 1974, Fromm, quoting neurologist R. B. Livingston, says: »The nervous cells show a remarkable degree of activity, as well as integration. In contrast to assumptions underlying the stimulus-response psychology, the brain is not merely *reactive* to outside stimuli, it is itself spontaneously *active.*« (Fromm 1991h [1974], p. 120.)

In Fromm's late work *To Have or To Be?*, he finally defines productivity as *orientation towards being*, whereby he understands »being« as that which can

be brought forth from the human being in terms of his own powers through the practice of these own powers. The most essential characteristic of the orientation to being »is that of being active, not in the sense of outward activity, of busyness, but of inner activity, the productive use of our human powers. To be active means to give expression to one's faculties, talents, to the wealth of human gifts with which☐though in varying degrees☐every human being is endowed« (1976a, p. 88). »We human beings have an inherent and deeply rooted desire to be: to express our faculties, to be active, to be related to others, to escape the prison cell of selfishness.« (Ibid., p. 100.)

The late work *To Have Or to Be?* is significant for Fromm's understanding of productivity in another respect as well. In it, he also shows characteristics or indicators that can be used to recognize whether human behavior is determined by the (non-productive) orientation towards having or by the (productive) orientation towards being (cf. 1976a, pp. 88-132; cf. also the chapter »Essentials of a life between having and being« in: 1993b, pp. 68-104). Such indicators are productive activity vs. passiveness, security vs. insecurity, solidarity vs. antagonism, joy vs. pleasure; different understandings of sin and forgiveness; the affirmation of the living vs. the fear of dying; and finally a different perception of time as being momentary vs. lasting, as well as a different perception of past, present and future.

There is a whole series of other terms to characterize productivity and productive orientation, but in my opinion they do not contain any new conceptual aspects. The terms »self-realization,« »positive freedom,« »selfhood,« and »revolutionary character« are worth mentioning here.

Concerning the Question of Whether Productivity is Discernable

If one surveys the various attempts Erich Fromm made in his work to define »productivity« and »productive orientation,« then two things stand out. On the one hand, it is impressive how much effort he made, even in his sixties, to underpin his humanistic option for a primary productive potential in humans with the help of a science-oriented concept of the empirical.

On the other hand, it is impressive how much he himself felt the need in the course of his life to make the understanding of productive orientation comprehensible through concepts, because (and although!) obviously every attempt to get hold of productivity in a concept is doomed to failure. Terms are equivocal, have a respective conceptual history, and are received in different ways. But today, as soon as a term designates something valuable, desirable, and ideal, it is marketed.

Many of the terms have become the talk of the town and advertising slogans, where they often denote the very opposite. »Self-realization« is made possible today with a credit card; »activity« by drinking coffee; »selfhood« by inflated self-esteem. The examples are only meant to illustrate that it is not possible to want to secure a non-ordinary experience – and in our culture this includes the experience of productive orientation – by assigning a special term to it. Artistic forms of expression in music, literature, dance, mime, visual art, etc., are also suitable only to a limited extent because they too are commodified, and the emotional content of metaphors, poetry, literary tales, myths, fairy tales, and heroic sagas is hardly understood anymore.

It has already been pointed out that productivity in Fromm's understanding cannot be recognized by concrete behavior because a single concrete behavior is always equivocal; that is, it can be motivated by different (conscious and unconscious) dynamic strivings (character traits and character orientations). Whether a productive or non-productive basic striving (character orientation) comes into play in a concrete behavior can nevertheless be recognized by the subjectively experienced and perceived effects of the behavior in question. These subjectively experienced and perceived effects can also be objectified and operationalized to a certain degree. The following effects can be measured:

1. Productivity as practicing life-promoting inherent powers has an *activating effect*: This is shown in the fact that the practice of these inherent powers enlivens one, makes one awake, inwardly active, intensely perceiving and attentive, sensual, interested, engaged, and diverting. A productive person avoids everything in which this activating effect is replaced by external activation and consumerism. Non-productivity, on the other hand, has a passivating effect: one feels bored, everything is tough and endlessly continuous, one feels inwardly empty or exploited, without sensuality and sensual needs, listless and tired.

2. Productivity as a practice of life-promoting own powers has an *energizing effect*: those who are related to themselves and to reality in a productive way experience that energy flows to them from relatedness, that they feel a fullness of life, that they want to »overflow« and develop a need to give, to share and to communicate. In the practice of loving, the experience of relatedness is potentiated. In contrast to this, the non-productive orientation is characterized by the fact that the energy of life decreases and is consumed in the process of relatedness, which exhausts, makes exhausted, costs strength, and creates a feeling of emptiness.

3. Productivity as a practice of life-promoting own powers has a *socializing effect*: it promotes the sociality of the human being, the emotional relatedness, the ability to be close to another human being, to really be related to him or

her with all senses, to be able to live in immediate communication and to be empathetic and compassionate. Non-productivity, on the other hand, has a distance-creating effect: only when the distance is clear – on the phone or when one is 500 miles apart – can one allow closeness; relatedness is characterized either by a schizoid quality or by one that narcissistically devalues the other or by the fact that human relatedness is replaced by business relatedness.

4. Productivity as a practice of life-promoting own powers has an *individualizing effect*: it promotes autonomy and self-determination, so that the human being experiences him or herself as distinct, autonomous, self-reliant, and independent and as a being who experiences himself or herself as strong and potent in commitment and dedication and who is not afraid of being »cashed in« by others, instrumentalized, or abused. Non-productivity, on the other hand, is characterized by something symbiotic, controlling, addictively dependent, or existentially necessarily connected. Being related is always intertwined with the fear of losing one's own freedom, potency, and autonomy.

5. Productivity as a practice of life-promoting own powers has an *integrating effect*: Those who realize themselves with their own possibilities experience themselves more »consistent,« more harmonious, more balanced, more »identical,« more consolidated, and more holistic. The integrating effect shows itself spiritually in a more meaningful life; psychologically in a more emotional life; physically in a life that is active in movement and at the same time relaxed; and in a stronger integration of these three dimensions of being human. Conversely, the non-productive orientation shows itself in the splitting of reality: the outer is separated from the inner reality; the differences between the own and the other are threatening and have to be overemphasized; and the mental-psychic-physical system is divided in order to experience oneself only as body, feeling, or intellect.

6. Productivity as a practice of life-promoting own powers has a *creative effect*: Those who activate their own potentials feel and experience themselves more creative, more imaginative, more intuitive, more sparkling, freer, and more spontaneous. The creative effect can also relate to the offspring or show in technical or artistic skills. Non-productivity, in contrast, has the effect of seeking repetition of the same; it is an expression of conformism and imitation behavior and wants to reconstruct.

7. Productivity as a practice of life-promoting intrinsic forces has an *ego-strengthening effect*: those who relate their intrinsic forces to the reality within and around them experience themselves as standing better in reality, on solid ground, and more capable of perception, suffering, frustration, and ambivalence. The non-productive orientation, on the other hand, is characterized by a regressive behavior to earlier stages of ego development, where

boundaries and differentiations are abolished again and security and connectedness are sought in dependence, in wanting to be carried, and in belonging and being part of someone else.

General Productivity Theory: Productivity as the Practice of Life-Promoting Own Powers

Every human being, as Fromm points out in *Man for Himself*, must »assimilate« himself to the natural and social-cultural conditions for the purpose of life and survival, and he must do so in all three dimensions of his humanity: in his thinking, in his feeling, and in his acting (1947a, pp. 58-60). Man can want to realize this assimilation performance, for example, by taking what he needs, by waiting idly until he gets something, by collecting and storing everything, by appropriating or abusing others, or by destroying or consuming the resources. These are all ways of managing one's life without activating one's own human powers and thus bringing forth (»producing«) something with the help of one's own powers, with the help of work and effort.

Thus, a person has the possibility to shape his life with the help of external powers that do not belong to him or with the help of life-promoting own powers. Such own forces can be of spiritual, psychic, or physical nature. A spiritual inherent power is, for example, the ability to remember, to think, or to imagine. Psychic inherent powers are, for example, the ability to trust, to be tender, to be able to concentrate, to be interested, to be able to love. A physical inherent power is, for example, the ability to move or use muscular strength.

While the physical own powers develop essentially by themselves through physical growth and the execution of life, the psychic and mental-spiritual capabilities require an activating stimulation through an emotional bond in order to unfold their activity, i.e. to emerge as own power and to finally be at one's disposal. Neuroscientific studies and observational infant research equally support the assumption that the psychological and mental own powers already show an activity of their own (self-activity) when they are sensed, perceived, contained, supported, satisfied, and mirrored by the caregiver, i.e. when they can express themselves in an affectionate and supporting emotional bond. On the other hand, this ability of productive self-activity cannot develop if the devoted and supporting emotional bond with the maternal figure is not available as an activating stimulus for self-activity or – even worse – if the readiness for self-activity is deliberately ignored, inhibited, stifled, or thwarted. This internal law of mental and psychic development certainly has a stronger

effect in the first years of life than in later life. And yet it applies throughout the entire psychic process of birth, that is, until the end of life.

Even if the psychic and mental-spiritual own powers have different preconditions for their emergence than the physical own powers, all own powers have one thing in common: they grow and are available as own powers only in as much as they are practiced. This can be illustrated particularly impressively by physical muscle strength: anyone who had his arm or leg in plaster for a few weeks and was no longer able to practice muscular power loses this physical own power and must first laboriously and often painfully learn them again by moving and training the muscles and thus practicing this own power.

The same holds true for mental own powers. For example, someone who does not practice and use his powers of memory, but writes down everything he has to remember on a piece of paper, will be able to remember less and less. And those who no longer practice their ability to fantasize – because instead of training their imagination by reading a book they prefer to watch a film that reduces the many possibilities of imagining and dictates one visualization – will become more and more lacking in imagination.

In the same way, it is true that all psychic own powers grow and are at one's disposal as own powers only to the extent that they are practiced. The ability to love does not depend on being loved, but on one's own practice of love: Only those who take a step towards someone else and »pass over« emotionally become capable of love. Only the one who performs acts of trust and can get involved with someone or something develops the ability to trust. And only if a person dares to be tender and to practice an unintentional closeness does this person become tender, that is, tenderness becomes his or her quality or peculiarity (proprietas).

In order to be able to distinguish life-promoting own powers from other psychic powers, for example, from irrational powers such as envy, jealousy, pleasure-seeking, etc., it is important to recall that for Fromm psychic powers are only life-promoting own powers when the primary »tendency toward integration and unification« is actualized through their practice (1964a, p. 46.). In the language of contemporary self-psychology, one could also say that the productive own powers make the human being grow psychically because their practice enables a structured and differentiated relatedness to external and internal reality. In this context, »structured relatedness« means that corresponding growth-oriented images of oneself and reality arise within the human being; »differentiated relatedness« means that these images correspond to the differentiated aspect and ambiguity of human life, and thus represent positive as well as negative, satisfying as well as frustrating, loving as well as aggressive experiences and that both can be endured at the same time.

The Productive Character Orientation:
Productive Reason, Love and Work

According to Fromm, productivity is the ability to draw on life-promoting energies by practicing them. Since this ability refers to all dimensions of human articulation, the general theory of productivity can be concretized in terms of these dimensions of productive character orientation. If the behavior of a person in thinking, feeling, and acting is oriented towards being active, i.e. towards the practice of the life-promoting spiritual, psychic, and physical own powers, then productive *reason* (ability to reasonably perceive reality), productive *love* (ability to be lovingly involved), and productive *work* (ability to creatively shape the world) occur. These manifestations of the productive character orientation are to be explained in more detail.

Productive work: »In the realm of *action*, the productive orientation is expressed in productive work, the prototype of which is art and craftsmanship« (1955a, p. 32.). Productive work has nothing to do with activism and busyness but »is characterized by the rhythmic change of activity and repose« (1947a, p. 107). If an activity is motivated and driven by fear or irrational passions, it does not fulfill the fundamental requirements of productive work: it must come freely and from its own impulse *(sua sponte)*. Even the simplest actions can be enactments of productive work. Just as little as productive orientation in work can be measured by the result of the work, so little is artistic quality a sure indication of productivity. Where the ability to act productively is mixed with artistic or craft talents, there can certainly be very impressive documentations of productive orientation. The decisive criterion of productive work, however, is the activation of life-promoting creative own powers and not the artistic quality (which today is increasingly dictated by the market).

Productive love: »In the realm of *feeling*, the productive orientation is expressed in love, which is the experience of union with another person, with all men, and with nature, under the condition of retaining one's sense of integrity and independence« (1955a, p. 32.). As always with productive orientation, what matters with productive love is that it is practiced. The ability to be able to love therefore only exists as the practice of love. As long as one only fantasizes about being lovingly related to someone else and lovingly approaching him or her, nothing much happens. Only when one is loving and »reaches over« to the other does the ability to love grow, and the more often, the greater the growth.

Productive love – regardless of whether it is the love of a mother for her child, the love of humanity, the erotic love between two people, the love of neighbor, or the love of self – can be specified by the following *character traits*:

- through *caring* and through a *sense of responsibility* for the other; both »denote that love is an activity and not a passion by which one is overcome, nor an affect which one is ›affected by‹« (1947a, p. 98);
- through *respect* for the other and *knowledge* of the beloved person because without these characteristics, care and a sense of responsibility »deteriorates into domination and possessiveness« (Ibid., p. 101);
- through *independence* and distinctness between the lovers with simultaneous capacity for *immediacy* and closeness to the other;
- through the *correspondence of love of neighbor and love of self*. »The attitude toward the ›stranger‹ is inseparable from the attitude toward oneself. As long as any fellow being is experienced as fundamentally different from myself, as long as he remains a stranger, I remain a stranger to myself too« (1962a, pp. 171 f.);
- through the desire to *share* and be communicative, that is, through the ability to give: »What matters is that which all men share, not that in which they differ« (1989a, p. 84.);
- by an *interest* in everything and an openness to all that is unknown;
- through the *ability to listen* and *to be completely with the other*, to *empathize* with the other and with his reality, need, and joy;
- through the ability to *trust*. Trust is not acquired by the other person first proving his or her trust; being able to trust is an aspect of love and becomes part of one's own capacity to the extent that one performs acts of trust.

As with all character *traits*, it is also true that those of productive orientation are not in themselves a sufficient indication of a productive character *orientation*. Someone who is determined by the desire to share, for example, can also be determined by an authoritarian or even narcissistic character orientation. Whether the desire to share actually manifests a productive orientation can only be recognized by the life-promoting or life-destroying effects that the practice of this character trait produces.

Productive reason: »In the realm of *thought*, this productive orientation is expressed in the proper grasp of the world by reason.« (1955a, p. 32.) By »reason« Fromm refers not only to an intellectual-spiritual capacity or to rationality, but primarily to the psychic capacity to be »reasonable,« that is, to be able to see reality in accordance with sensory, cognitive, and intellectual cognitions, not distorted and distorted, but as it actually reveals itself to the subject. Productive reason thus has to do with the simultaneous existence of reproductive and generative perceptive capacities (cf. 1947a, pp. 88-92).

Fromm's concept of reason demarcates itself both from a subjectivist or voluntarist wishful thinking and from an instrumental reasoning. Reason does not characterize the knowledge of the »know-how,« the realization of how

something is connected, works, and functions. Productive reason is rather a psychic ability and denotes a certain way, namely a »reasonable« way of dealing with reality. It, too, must be practiced if it is to be available as a skill in coping with our lives. Therefore, it is not readily available to the human being with the development of his intellect but must be learned specifically by the practice of dealing reasonably with reality. Only the one who tries anew to see reality in the way it reveals itself to that person, and not in the way he wishes it to be or would like to change it or in the way it is conveyed to him by interest-led authorities and media, learns the ability to deal with reality reasonably.

This reasonable approach to reality is thus endangered from two sides in particular. The first threat has to do with our desires, needs, fears, and distresses, which can lead us to only see reality in a way that accommodates our desires, does not frighten us, or does not make us feel guilty, and so on. The second danger comes from how reality is conveyed to us. This danger is becoming greater today because more and more people do not perceive reality directly but through television, radio, and newspapers, through books and magazines, through teachers or reporters, and through electronic media, chat rooms, and podcasts. They all report on reality and thus convey facts, images, ideas, beliefs, and interpretations about reality which are distorted by prejudices, opinions, misinformation, clichés, etc.

The ability to deal with reality in a reasonable way can therefore only be practiced and learned when people try to live their own direct encounter with reality, form their own judgment, have their own perceptions, and are critical towards any kind of mediated perception of reality. Only through the practice of reasonable contact with reality does this mental ability to reason grow. Where it is missing, gross misperceptions occur.

Similar to productive love, productive reason can also be described in more detail by typical *character traits*:

– While intelligence only sees things in terms of appearance, functionality, and usefulness, the *ability to deal with reality in a reasonable way* is able »to penetrate through the surface and to grasp the essence of [an]object« (1947a, p. 97); it thus includes »a third dimension, that of depth, which reaches to the essence of things and processes« (Ibid., p. 102);

– by the *ability of objectivity and to have a sense of reality* by using the whole subjectivity of the recognizing person. It is undoubtedly a matter of objectivity when the object is seen as it reveals itself and not as the person recognizing it would like it to be; but this does not mean that the object is understood as something dead or as a thing of no concern. »On the contrary, the subject is intensely interested in his object, and the more intimate this relation is, the more fruitful is his thinking.« (Ibid.);

- through the ability to make oneself the object of cognition, that is, through the *ability of self-knowledge*; only those who are able to see themselves as they are can develop the ability of objectivity;
- through *genuine interest* and, at the same time, through *respect* for the object; »objectivity does not mean detachment, it means respect« (Ibid., p. 105);
- by the ability to see in *totality* what is to be known; one who isolates and only wants to know one aspect of the object without seeing the whole will not correctly understand even this one aspect;
- through the *capacity for concentration*. The capacity for immediacy and closeness in productive loving corresponds to the capacity for concentration in productive thinking (cf. 1989a [1974-75], pp. 44-49).

Non-Productivity as Alienation from Productivity

What Fromm understands by »productivity« and »productive orientation« can be further clarified by also considering his understanding of non-productivity. Since Freud, psychoanalysis understands mental illness as a fixation on a developmental stage or as a regression to an earlier developmental stage (cf. 1955a, pp. 70-71). Fromm agrees with this, but modifies the concept of regression. Once a person has detached himself from his primary ties, there is no possibility of reconnecting to these early ties: »Primary bonds once severed cannot be mended; once paradise is lost, man cannot return to it« (1941a, p. 35). The only possibility of »regression« is to look for a substitute for what was experienced earlier and to flee from the more mature and frightening situation. Such »escape mechanisms« (as substitutes for the irretrievably lost primary bonds) are already described in *Escape from Freedom*: as an escape into the authoritarian, the conformist, and the destructive. (That is why the original English title is *Escape from Freedom* and not *The Fear of Freedom*.)

In order to avoid coping with the fear arising with each step of individuation and independence, a habitualization of substitute forms occurs, i.e. a non-productive character formation, which has the function of permanently escaping the fear of the feeling of separateness and isolation. For example, if one flees into an authoritarian subjection, then one seeks a permanent substitute for the early primary ties in the authoritarian character formation.

Fromm made a second attempt to determine non-productivity (and thus indirectly productivity) in the early 1950s when he introduced his psychoanalytic-clinical understanding of alienation, as well as his account of existential human needs. The need to satisfy specifically human needs implies that a different set of inherent laws applies to humans than to animals. The animal

is largely instinct-driven; its success or failure depends primarily on environmental conditions and (to a lesser extent) on its ability to adapt to changing environmental conditions.

According to Fromm, the extensive reduction of both instinct in humans and their abilities for self-consciousness and imagination does not mean that humans are to be understood as an unwritten sheet of paper on which culture can write a completely arbitrary text. The existential needs (such as that for relatedness) are, as it were, lines on this sheet of paper, so culture and society cannot write their text completely arbitrarily. A human being can satisfy his psychological need to be related in a submissive, exploitative, dominating way or in a caring, loving, solidary way. All are human possibilities, but it is not possible for a human being to renounce the satisfaction of this need. Also, all are human possibilities but not all of them are conducive to the well-being of a person and the development of his possibilities.

For Fromm, there is a second result of the particular constitution of the human being: In the satisfaction of physical needs (for example, to eat and drink) one can determine modes of satisfaction that are beneficial or detrimental to the physical health of the human being. Similarly, in the case of psychic needs, one can determine modes of satisfaction that are beneficial or detrimental. Beneficial are those which allow the human being to grow psychologically; detrimental are those which hinder him in his tendency to grow or thwart this tendency and turn it into its opposite. Forms of satisfaction that support the growth tendency are therefore »primary potentialities« for Fromm; they are rooted in the human being itself and tend to actualize themselves first, which is why Fromm counts them as part of the intrinsic nature of the human being. However, if this primary potentiality, which is typical for every human life, does not come into play, then it is because the demands of economic activity and the requirements of social coexistence lead people to develop such forms of satisfaction that do not aim at the growth of the person and his own powers, but at the functioning of social cohesion at the expense of the growth potentialities of the individual. Man is also capable of such forms of satisfaction that are detrimental to growth and health, but they are secondary potentialities which are actualized only when the primary potentiality is impeded or thwarted.

Against the background of this theory, it becomes understandable why Fromm defines »mental health not in terms of the ›adjustment‹ of the individual to his society,« although Fromm's entire interest is, after all, aimed at the social formation of the person, but »*that it must be defined in terms of the adjustment of society to the needs of man*, of its role in furthering or hindering the development of mental health« (1955a, p. 72.).

The general theory about the emergence of non-productive orientations and non-productivity received an important extension in Fromm's work when he combined it with the concept of alienation in the early 1950s (Cf. 1955a, pp. 120-151 and 191-208, and 1991e [1953].). His psychoanalytic-clinical understanding of alienation makes it possible to survey the different psychodynamics of the non-productive orientations. While he himself has only done this for the authoritarian orientation and, to a large extent, also for the marketing orientation, this concept allows for the examination of the respective psychodynamics of non-productivity in all non-productive social character orientations. A psychodynamic approach to the quality of non-productivity can only occur after recognizing which aspects of humanity a narcissistic, hoarding, necrophilous, or ego-oriented person alienates from their self. It can then be recognized what happens psychologically to those productive own powers of man when they are no longer experienced as one's own and are therefore no longer available to the individual in the pursuit of life as life-promoting own powers. Only when one knows on whom or what the intrinsic powers have been projected can one be retrieved from the alienation; only then are statements possible about which aspects of being human need to be revived in order to achieve more productivity.

A psychodynamic approach to non-productivity enables a special theory of productivity. This means that for any non-productive orientation, it can be determined what the change to more productivity would mean for that specific orientation. As helpful as it is to generally define productivity as the practice of the life-promoting own powers of reason, love, and work, such a general definition remains non-specific concerning, for example, an authoritarian character orientation. One does not know yet which own powers must be strengthened and are suitable to reduce the alienation – the alienating powers. Only the realization that the symbiotic ties to authority always go hand in hand with the loss of the own powers of self-determination and autonomy makes it possible for the strengthening of autonomous self-determination. Hence disobedience towards alienating authorities will become life-promoting own powers, whose practice leads to a strengthening of the productive orientation within an authoritarian structure.

Special Productivity Theory:
The Alienation Dynamics of Non-Productive Character Orientations
as a Key to Understanding Productivity

In order to recognize the special significance of productivity, the dynamics of alienation will be demonstrated based on four non-productive character ori-

entations that are particularly prevalent in people in the highly industrialized societies of the present.

(1) The authoritarian character

Even if the authoritarian character orientation is losing importance in highly industrialized societies, it still plays a significant role among particularly privileged social groups, such as the military, the judiciary, medicine, churches and religious groups, and, of course, the right-wing (and sometimes also the left-wing) political spectrum.

While one speaks of authoritarian orientation in economy, politics, and society, it can also be considered in a psychological sense, where being related to others, to oneself, to nature, to work, etc., is defined by *domination* and *submissiveness* and the dominant and the submissive are at the same time symbiotically related to each other. The structure of domination is psychologically achieved by the fact that the submissive, under pressure from the domineering, gets rid of their autonomous own powers – that let a person be competent, knowing, strong, independent, and free – by projecting them onto the authority and, at the same time, submitting to the authority in order to get a secondary share of one's own powers projected onto the authority in the symbiotic dependence on the authority.

The authority is primarily interested in the submissive's freedom, independence, autonomy, aggressive self-assertion potential, competence, autonomy, etc. In other words, everything that would distinguish the submissive as an autonomous subject. The authoritarian's claim to rule comes from knowing it is secure with its dependents because of symbiotic dependence on the authority figure. (It is the nature of symbiosis that the one exercising dominance also depends on the submissive and is nothing without him. He projects his own feelings of powerlessness and weakness onto the submissive, making him the bearer of his unaccepted aspects of self).

Under the pressure of the ruler, the submissive thus becomes alienated from his own powers; however, the submissive can get in touch with them again if he recognizes them as aspects of authority and submits to authority. It is no longer the person himself who possesses the own powers but the authority. The authority is now powerful, wise, exalted, strong, caring, benevolent, gracious, etc. The actual self-experience of the authoritarian oriented generated by the projection of the life-promoting own powers must thereby be repressed and can remain in repression as long as the submissive is secondarily connected to his own powers via symbiosis with the authority figure. However, if the mutual symbiotic dependence is seriously threatened, decompensation occurs and

self-alienation is painfully perceived. For as well as authoritarian compensation may work, the following is true: »The more powerful an idol becomes – that is, the more I transfer on it – the poorer I become and the more I am dependent on it, since I am lost if I lose that onto which I have transferred everything that I have.« (1992d [1961], p. 24.)

If the symbiosis no longer prevails, then the mostly repressed experience, which previously perhaps only manifested itself in dreams, comes to the fore: self-experience is determined by feelings of powerlessness, inferiority, abandonment, helplessness, loneliness, shame, and guilt, while being related to authority, instead of a conscious idealization, admiration, and gratitude, now shows itself preferably through a fear of and about authority or through a »merciless« fight against authority and a corresponding anti-authoritarianism.

The authoritarian alienation dynamic leads to a loss of productivity, which is not only reflected in an authoritarian social character formation but also in neurotic symptoms and psychic disorders in those people who are not sufficiently capable of such an authoritarian character formation, resulting in the occurrence of a neurotic conflict formation. It then manifests itself, for example, in a more or less pathological dependence and lack of independence, in physical, sexual, and moral masochism and sadism, in irrational fears and feelings of guilt whenever a person dares to be autonomous, in selflessness based on self-sacrifice, in inferiority complexes, and in a striving for submissiveness, as well as in fixations on the rebellious and anti-authoritarian and in the resulting external and internal conflicts.

Whether it is a matter of a therapeutic cancellation of the alienation of the life-promoting own powers or the cancellation of an alienation bound in an authoritarian character formation, it is always a matter of special life-promoting own powers which have to be retrieved from the alienation and projection or have to be revived and practiced in oneself. The description of the psychodynamics of authoritarian alienation has made it clear which own powers are primarily at stake; *in the case of an authoritarian character structure, productivity means first and foremost the dissolution of symbiotic dependence* – i.e., gaining freedom, autonomy and independence – and the rediscovery of one's own strengths (or in the case of the authoritarian, the rediscovery of one's own limitations, weakness, and powerlessness). All own powers that can be mobilized for the experience of autonomy, freedom, and independence – aggression in the service of independence, one's own potencies and competencies, one's own caring and mothering, one's self-assured knowledge and skills, etc. – must be exercised and practiced. The stronger these life-promoting own powers become, the more dominant the productive orientation becomes and the more the non-productivity of authoritarian origin is reduced.

(2) The marketing character

The second alienation dynamic highlighted here is the marketing orientation. This character orientation is all about sales strategy – marketing. Be it goods, services, works of art, religion, pedagogical concepts, or one's own personality, the decisive factor is always that one successfully sells the goods and oneself like commodities. Above all, one must be able to slip into those roles that are profitable and lead to success.

Because everything we think, feel, and perform is about marketing, attention is always focused on appearance. The main focus everywhere is on the packaging, the design, the image, the spectacle, the communication, the didactics, the performance, the presentation, the outfit, and the staging. The question of what someone actually does and achieves, who someone is, and what abilities someone actually has is secondary at most. Even the helping, caring, healing, consulting, and administrative professions now talk about customers, products, effectiveness, efficiency, and quality assurance – in other words, they see their activities and the services they offer as commodities that need to be sold.

One's own personality and its attributes, one's actual cognitive and emotional abilities, one's authentic self – all this is hardly still in demand in the reign of marketing, especially since such idiosyncrasies are often an obstacle to being adaptable, flexible, unbound, mobile, cool, and always in a good mood. What matters is that one can adapt to the market's requirements like a chameleon and acquire the personality attributes and roles that promise success and belonging to the winners and victors.

The marketing character wants to renounce anything that could distinguish his own unique, individual personality. His inherent nature becomes alien to him, and he encounters it as a role and personality he slips into in order to succeed in the market. To quote Fromm:

> »In the marketing orientation, man encounters his own powers as commodities alienated from him. He is not one with them, but they are masked from him because what matters is not his self-realization in the process of using them but his success in the process of selling them. Both his powers and what they create become estranged, something different from himself, something for others to judge and to use; thus, his feeling of identity (…) is constituted by the sum total of roles one can play: ›*I am as you desire me.*‹« (1947a, p. 72 f.)

The dynamics of alienation manifest in a number of *behavioral problems,* for

instance, an obvious *superficiality* of relationships. People are and remain strangers to each other because relatedness to another is *based neither on any deeper feelings nor on any real interest in the other*. »When the individual self is neglected (…) not they themselves but interchangeable commodities are related. People are not able and cannot afford to be concerned with that which is unique and »peculiar« in each other. (1947a, p. 74.)

The marketing character can only sense himself when he makes it and is successful. Someone or something else decides about his sense of identity: his response, sales figures, quota, success, fans, etc. If success deserts him because his marketing strategies in the form of promotional personality traits (such as always appearing friendly and obliging or interested and compassionate), professional competencies, or a self-confident air no longer work or are no longer desired, he not only becomes a loser, he above all loses himself. He starts to falter, »crashes,« becomes depressed and feels internally empty, without motivation and bored. From a psychodynamic perspective, the marketing orientation corrupts identity experience and impedes the ability of his psychic growth capacity to experience itself as identical to his self-esteem and his own powers.

Someone who lives under social conditions that generally lead to a loss of a sense of identity based on one's capacities and strengths can only *preserve or regain a productive orientation* by the purposeful exercise of those intrinsic powers that build identity. The point is not to do the opposite and thereby be rigid instead of flexible, refuse to perform instead of try to succeed, or withdraw from the competition in order to escape the rat race. Those who deny the non-productive impulse are still engaged with what is non-productive and are not yet exercising their productive powers.

Exercising one's own *productive* powers in the face of a non-productive marketing orientation means making space again for *one's own powers that build identity*. More concrete examples include:

– The courage to feel one's own feelings, to think one's own thoughts, and to determine one's own actions;
– The mobilization and activation of one's own sensory gifts: listening exercises, visual exercises, touching exercises, and movement exercises – in order to remember that we have eyes with which to see, ears with which to hear, and skin that allows us to touch and feel;
– A tolerance for emotionality (one's own affects and feelings) that is not oriented around success;
– The claim and use of a protected space outside of the market (such as musical activities and interactions with loved ones);
– The privileging of (process-oriented) activities that require commitment, interest, and emotional attachment regardless of the outcome;

– The ability to be able to disappoint expectations and to be interested in the losers instead of focusing on success and winning

– The acceptance of disadvantages and the endurance of adversity;

– The acknowledgment of one's own limits and given limitations and the respect and regard for the capacities and limitations of others;

– The courage to see also the dark sides of life, to look squarely in the eye a life that has failed or gone wrong;

– The practice of a productive consumption, in which one orients oneself only on the use value instead of the market value and additional benefits and renounces bargain hunting.

In essence, all of the above examples are about reducing dependence on the echo of success and recognition by others and, at the same time, regaining an authentic self-experience and a sense of togetherness so that the productive, identity-creating own powers are strengthened.

(3) The narcissistic character and group narcissism

Today narcissism is being understood mostly as something completely normal. Even the professional literature posits that everyone needs a healthy sense of narcissism, even for biological reasons of survival. The argument continues, however, that this normal narcissism can become pathological, a disordered narcissism.

In order to avoid any definitional misunderstandings in the following re-marks about Fromm's understanding of narcissism, I would like to point to the distinctions and differentiations that he made: Fromm's social-psychoana-lytic approach implies that every person must necessarily be self-related. This relatedness to oneself, however, has nothing to do with narcissism. As with relatedness to other people, a relatedness to oneself can be satisfied in various ways: solicitously, negligently, harshly, mercilessly, lovingly, with interest, etc. Here too, everything is possible, but not every way of satisfying the need for a sense of identity encourages the psychic capacity for growth and allows man to thrive (see 1955a, pp. 60-62).

If a positive relationship to oneself characterized by self-love and self-in-terest is permanently impeded or even thwarted by individual and social ex-periences of devaluation, then a way out of the permanent and unbearable experience can be sought through a selfish character formation: *by making oneself independent of the recognition of others and by imagining one's own greatness*. With the idealization of one's own, there is an alienation from the other that needs to be analyzed in more detail.

»Narcissism is an orientation in which all one's interest and passion are directed to one's own person: one's body, mind, feelings, interests, and so forth. (…) For the narcissistic person, only he and what concerns him are fully real; what is outside, what concerns others, is real only in a superficial sense of perception; that is to say, it is real for one's senses and for one's intellect. But it is not real in a deeper sense, for our feeling or understanding. He is, in fact, aware only of what is outside, inasmuch as it affects him. Hence, he has no love, no compassion, no rational, objective judgment. The narcissistic person has built an invisible wall around himself. He is everything, the world is nothing. Or rather: He is the world.« (1989 [1974-75], p. 117)

The most striking hallmark of narcissistic character formation is the alienation from the other. Any interest in others' selves or their difference, even their foreignness, gradually wanes because all attention is focused solely on the self. But there is also an alienation from oneself because everything negative in self-experience has to be repressed and denied.

The escape from an unbearable to a narcissistic experience of identity always contains a *distorted perception* of reality outside of oneself, but also of oneself. This sort of distorted perception can generally be described as *idealizing* or *devaluing*. For that reason, narcissistic people are most easily recognized by their concern with greatness and idealization or worthlessness and devaluation.

Flight into a distorted perception of self fundamentally changes the relationship to other people and to reality outside of one's ego. Focusing all attention and energy on self-idealization is only possible at the expense of interest in other people and other things. We can distinguish *two forms of devaluation* of everything that does not belong to the grandiose ego (see 1964a, pp. 77-80; 1970b, pp. 254-255; 1991f [1962], pp. 86-93).

(1) In the first form, the narcissistic character does exhibit an – also idealizing – interest in another person, even in many other people, or in a theme or project, but the interest, appreciation, and engagement return to the narcissist like a boomerang. In reality, such people attempt to instrumentalize other people and things for their own self-aggrandizement, so their interest in others is really a *self-centered interest*. Many partnerships, parent-child relationships, and professional relationships suffer intensely from such an instrumentalizing, low-grade narcissism, which Fromm termed *benign narcissism*. Those who are instrumentalized in this way suffer because, despite the proclaimed idealization, they always have the feeling that it is not really about them but rather about the greatness, power, and success of the other. Their only function is to mirror the other in his greatness or to expand and complement it.

(2) If the first form of devaluation expresses itself as a feigned interest, which is really a *lack* of interest in everything that is different and refuses to be *instrumentalized* for one's own grandiosity, the second form of devaluation expresses itself directly and without apology: to secure one's own grandiosity, everything that does not serve this purpose is experienced as a threat, declared an enemy and held at a distance. It comes to a parting of the ways. At all relationship levels, it becomes a matter of either/or: either the other gives himself over so totally to the narcissist that he thinks, feels, acts, and wants exactly the same things, or he will be declared an enemy and belong to the »axis of evil.«

If the other, or anything different, can still exist in the presence of the narcissist, then it is only as an *appropriated other* in which there is nothing left of the other's difference (in narcissistic partnerships, this is often experienced as the »great love«). But this markedly possessive narcissism, also deemed »malignant« by Fromm, differs greatly from only instrumentalizing narcissism in interactions with what is outside the self and the other. In marked narcissism, the interaction with oneself also exhibits a heightened grandiosity and a strengthened defense of the same, which tolerates no questioning. This leads to the need to keep every negative experience and self-perception at a distance. As a consequence, all deficits, imperfections, failures, errors, and any weakness in oneself must be denied and projected onto others. The *projection of one's own deficits onto stereotypes of the enemy* and the existential necessity of such stereotypes belong to the marked narcissistic character.

Both forms of the narcissistic character, the low-grade instrumentalizing and the strongly marked possessive narcissism, are non-productive because they hinder man's capacity for growth in his need to satisfy his individual and social sense of identity. The non-productive quality manifests itself primarily in an alienation from the other and the stranger and in an alienation from aspects of one's self that are at odds with one's fantasized grandiosity, that is, in alienation from all negative and mediocre self-experiences and emotional self-perceptions.

The same is true for *group narcissism*, which Fromm described for the first time in 1964 (see 1964a, pp. 78-87). With the concept of group narcissism, Fromm illustrates the importance that narcissistic leaders, idealized social groups (nations, clubs, associations, parties, etc.), and family ties (clans, extended families, nuclear families) assume in order to compensate for deficits in one's sense of identity.

His argument is that one's own sense of worthlessness is not eliminated by one's *own* ideas of grandiosity but rather by identifying with the idealization of that group to which one feels a sense of belonging and through which one feels a social sense of identity. According to Fromm, every person is a social

being from the start and is related not only to singular individuals, but also to a social group (similar to what sociobiologists posit today with their attachment theory), which is why people do not want to experience their identity solely as individuals but also – through their group affiliation – as social beings.

With regard to narcissistic group affiliation, Fromm writes:

>»Even if one is the most miserable, the poorest, the least respected member of a group, there is compensation for one's miserable condition in feeling ›I am a part of the most wonderful group in the world. I, who in reality am a worm, become a giant through belonging to the group.‹ Consequently, the degree of group narcissism is commensurate with the lack of real satisfaction in life.« (1973a, p. 230)

In fact, this form of narcissism is usually most common in the political arena, from the *Führer* cult and racial delusions of the »Thousand (!) Year Reich« to the right-wing populist movements of the present.

Also, group narcissistic character formations always come at the expense of any genuine interest in other people and everything that goes beyond the comfortably familiar. They represent, even in their weak form, a major obstacle to the capacity to grow psychologically. Man can only grow psychologically when he is capable of breaking new ground and when he wants to become familiar with what is foreign – in others and himself. Because people differ from each other in multiple ways, an interest in the other is absolutely necessary for social coexistence.

In every form of narcissism, the other's difference loses its attractiveness and society's atomization advances. The stronger the narcissism, the more the lack of interest in the other turns into hostility toward everything that is not one's own. Society's loss of solidarity evolves into battles between narcissistic groups within a nation and more or less hostile demarcations between other nations, ethnicities, and cultures. The grave social and political consequences of narcissistic character formations show that »narcissism is the opposite pole to objectivity, reason and love« (1955a, p. 36).

If one wants to counteract the alienation from the other and negative and non-ideal aspects in oneself, then productive strategies of change should aim to integrate deficient aspects of the personality into conscious experience and self-esteem. Only this can reduce the necessity for flight into grandiose notions of the self and the necessity of projecting disavowed aspects onto the environment.

Any change in the dynamics of alienation among narcissistic character formations requires that one does not defend oneself against narcissistic hostility, devaluation, rage, and the production of stereotypes, but rather that

one remains open to them with understanding. One must be able to feel: this aggressive, dismissive, arrogant, provocative person, in reality, feels injured, disappointed, and hurt – whether justified or unjustified. In such nonjudgmental empathy lies the key to establishing a relationship with the disavowed negative sense of identity and the deficient parts of the personality.

In parallel to the efforts to liberate the narcissist from his »splendid isolation« through a nonjudgmental empathy so that his interest in other people and things external to him becomes palpable again, it is necessary to make past and present concrete experiences of devaluation (for example, in professional, familial, and religious contexts) conscious; there are also opportunities and chances to help the person achieve a realistic (and this usually means more modest) sense of self-esteem.

What applies to working with the narcissistic grandiosity of the individual is, in principle, also valid for *interacting with the narcissism of groups*. A pitched battle against nationalistic and racist narcissists is, from a psychological point of view, as a rule, counterproductive and advisable only when social cooperation has been severely impaired; otherwise, here, too, a nonjudgmental empathy with these groups' experience of devaluation and the elimination of the economic and social dynamic of devaluation are key in depriving group narcissism of its oxygen.

Since narcissistic and group narcissistic character formations are usually intended to keep an unbearable feeling of worthlessness, powerlessness, or helplessness in repression, access to such feelings and their integration into an ambivalent experience of oneself and others (or of one's own organization or social group) is only possible *when experiences of self-efficacy and interpersonal experiences of appreciation are made.* These will help to avoid an escape into the idealization of one's own and the devaluation of everything that is not one's own. At the same time, they help to recognize the devaluing structures to which one has exposed oneself voluntarily or involuntarily.

However, such positive self-experiences must be *free of suggestion*. Any suggestion of one's own strength and worth (in education, at work, in appraisals, etc.) that is not based on the factually achieved performance flatters narcissism and only leads to a welcome reinforcement of narcissism by a co-narcissist. This does not address the narcissist's problem of not being able to tolerate a deficit, and the interest in the other remains limited to getting more narcissistic strokes.

The integration of negative aspects of one's own personality, the social group, or the organization or company requires spaces for relationships and experiences in which negative, critical, difficult, and devaluing aspects can become conscious and be expressed. Instead of rituals of self-idealization, there is a need for protected spaces for criticism and conflict articulation so

that the dark sides can once again belong to one's own and do not have to be projected onto others and strangers.

Productive orientation thus means something different in a narcissistic character than in an authoritarian character or a marketing character: only when the distorted perception of reality, of other people, and of one's own self loses its significance can human behavior have a humanly productive effect.

(4) The Ego-Oriented Character

For about three decades, a new social character has emerged (which in 2006 could already be detected in almost 20% of the adult population in Germany – see Frankenberger 2007 for a summary), which I have analyzed using Fromm's method. I have called it the »Ego-oriented character« (Funk 2005; 2011; 2019, pp. 129-143). Ego-oriented people usually also want to be successful. However, their thoughts, feelings, and actions are determined even more strongly by the desire to be *self-determined* and produce reality in a new and different way, namely independently and free of all natural constraints or social requirements.

Its emergence as a social character is due to the achievements of *digital technology, networking technology, and electronic media*. A great deal that previously seemed limited by technical, natural, and social constraints is suddenly possible. The digital revolution, with its fantastic computing, staging, and simulation techniques, has opened up unimagined possibilities for creating reality in a new and different way, physically and virtually – and without the previous limitations and dependencies.

Thus, there is an increasing *striving for the removal of boundaries and the absence of ties*. Ego-oriented people not only wish for a life without boundaries and ties but actively strive for it by developing other patterns of relatedness and attachment. Sometimes these have the appearance of egoism and narcissism, but psychologically they represent a different kind of ego emphasis: their ego wants to be completely self-determined in relating and allows for this striving in everyone else as well.

The Ego-oriented character exists in two versions, an active and a passive one. Similar to the authoritarian character, who either wants to exercise sadistic domination or is masochistically submissive, the *active* Ego-orientated person wants to *reinvent* himself and his environment, his lifestyle, and his world of experience and produces his own delimited realities, feelings, and experiences; the *passive* Ego-oriented person, on the other hand, wants to participate in such newly constructed realities *in a self-determined way* and chooses *the* lifeworld, lifestyle, brand, and music style that *suits* him.

As beneficial as the elimination of boundaries with the help of digital tech-nology, networking technology, and electronic media is in science, research, producing and communicating, and, above all, in coping with everyday life, the effort to remove boundaries becomes questionable if it is directed *at one's own personality* with its emotional forces of relatedness and if one wants to *replace* what internally determines the human being on the basis of his or her psychic structural formations with a *mental reconstruction of the personality*.

Much of what makes us spontaneously active, what intrinsically motivates us, animates us, interests us, has hardly any chance of keeping up in view of the enthralling, inspiring and stimulating effects of staged and virtual experience offers, so *our own impulses* are practiced to an ever lesser extent. As a con-sequence, one must often first be »animated,« enlivened, inspired, and made interested in order to be able to feel one's own interest, activity, and liveliness if no agonizing boredom is to arise.

With regard to their *own feelings*, Ego-oriented people find themselves in a dilemma: On the one hand, it is precisely their own feelings that make their limitations and being bound obvious to them, so they want to leave them be-hind. On the other hand, feelings are highly individual, alive, and invigorating and an extremely effective possibility for establishing self-determined reality, contact, and communication and being connected with others.

The ego-oriented character solves this dilemma by »going all out for ›emo-tion,‹« but in doing so, usually does not rely on his own feelings but either actively stages or simulates completely different feelings or is passively con-nected to the offers of feelings provided at every turn today – and thus *feels along* with them instead of feeling them himself.

In this way, especially negatively experienced (hurting, painful) feelings towards others, but also negatively experienced emotions of the self, largely fade out – i.e., are repressed and denied. As a result, the ability to deal with conflict and criticism also suffers, and – for example, in professional contexts – a kind of compliant obedience to the demands of the »corporate culture« occurs despite the overpowering striving for self-determination.

With the Ego-oriented character, there is an undeniable striving *to replace* the practice of cognitive and emotional own powers with the application of a »made« power in terms of tools, apps, training, guides, manuals, staging, and simulation technologies – so that there is a progressive »de-activation« of one's own thinking, feeling and fantasizing and an increasing dependence on *technical creativity*. This is precisely the »vision« of the pioneers of a life with algorithms and artificial intelligence. With their Big Data, they are able to replace our own thinking, judging, feeling, and willingness with »tailored« solutions and open up new markets for themselves (cf. Schmidt & Cohen 2013; Zuboff 2019).

The *mental reconstruction of personality* is no longer a Utopia. Today we are in a position largely to dispense with our own human powers. Thanks to search engines, we need not get ahold of know-how anymore. The art of living is reduced – according to the Ego-oriented vision – to the application of given solutions by technical creativity.

The Ego-oriented character differs from the productive character precisely in the way that he *attempts to substitute* his *human* creativity with all-powerful *technical* creativity, while the productive character uses technical creativity in order to empower his human creativity – for example, to expand his musical gifts with the help of a synthesizer that produces new soundscapes.

The degree to which technical creativity expresses an Ego-orientation or to which someone uses technical creativity to optimize his human creativity can be determined by visualizing how a weekend without electricity (and a battery) would look. Such visualization can quickly make clear if a lack of electronic media, contacts, internet, entertainment, news, Spotify, and videos leaves one feeling alienated, empty, helpless, and »out of one's mind« or if one knows what to do with oneself and others and can still draw on one's own physical, psychic, and mental powers.

In *psychodynamic* terms, the ego staging itself as omnipotent is to compensate for the lack of relationship to and attachment to inner psychic structures and impulse forces – with the result that the human ego becomes even weaker and even more dependent on technical creativity in reality. The meaning of self-determination, which is so central for the active as well as for the passive form of the Ego-oriented character and which suggests a completely spontaneous and autonomous subject, is, in reality, a rationalization with which the dependence on technical tools is to be concealed and prevented from becoming conscious.

The Ego-oriented person cannot become aware that there has been a general shift in leadership roles: he no longer experiences himself as a subject who is led by his own powers – ideas, aspirations, desires, expressions of will, etc. – but instead is led by technics and their inherent capacities. Here we can understand why the Ego-oriented person wants to be connected without being attached. Without connection, he has no access to »his« technical creativity.

Human non-productivity manifests itself in the Ego-oriented character in a different form of alienation and dependence than in the authoritarian, marketing, or narcissistic character. The Ego-oriented character makes himself increasingly dependent on technical creativity in order to no longer be bound to his limited mental powers. However, to the extent that he tries to replace his human creativity and no longer practices the mental powers, they atrophy – according to the neuronal axiom: »Use it or lose it.«

In order to counter the non-productive orientation of the Ego-oriented character, there remains only the possibility, parallel to the use of technical creativity, to exercise very specifically one's cognitive, emotional, and imaginative own powers and to continue to put them to use (as we have learned relatively quickly in the case of physical own powers). Such a purposeful activation of the limited own mental abilities means not only being able to give priority to the *own* thinking, the *own* feeling, the *own* fantasies, the *own* judgment, the *own* interest, but also:

– being satisfied with less and with more modest results;
– being able to stand up to the striving for self-optimization with a culture of self-sufficiency;
– being able to endure certain dependencies and resist realities instead of fleeing into staged and simulated realities;
– being able to feel, including negative feelings towards others and oneself, to suffer from them, and to deal with them in a productive way;
– being able to practice reality-based thinking and feeling instead of practicing positive thinking and feeling by ignoring the negative;
– being related emotionally and being able to separate emotionally;
– being able to renounce the fictitious, virtual, and illusionary and endure the ambiguous reality;
– being able to be alone without being medially connected but with the help of one's own powers of imagination.

Conclusion

The four social character orientations should be used to point out how differently their non-productive qualities can appear and that, therefore, what human productivity means according to Fromm can also be determined from the specific alienation in the social character.

It should be taken into account that no human being is merely the mirror image of dominant economic and social interests. The often alienating adaptations to what is economically, socially, culturally, and technically demanded are usually countered by a powerful impulse to develop and realize one's own productive powers.

In addition, many people have internalized a mixture of very different, sometimes contradictory group-specific interests. Also, their behavior is not only disposed by social character orientations but is determined by many individual character traits, some of which are highly productive.

The distinctive feature of Fromm's approach is, nevertheless, to under-

stand the individual first and foremost as a social being and, at the same time, as determined by passionate impulses of which he is often unaware. This is precisely what makes it difficult to develop a productive orientation. To use Fromm's own words:

> »The average person, while he thinks he is awake, actually is half asleep. By ›half asleep‹ I mean that his contact with reality is a very partial one; most of what he believes to be reality (outside or inside of himself) is a set of fictions which his mind constructs. He is aware of reality only to the degree to which his social functioning makes it necessary.« (1960a, p. 60.)

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