

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

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ABSTRACT

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

Keywords

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

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