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The Ego-Oriented Man And His Strivings Erich Fromm's Social Characterological Concept of Man and Its Relevance for Today

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Резюме. Статья Райнера Функа «Эго-ориентированный человек и его стремления» начинается с обсуждения социально-психологической концепции Эриха Фромма. Далее автор представляет тип нового характера, который можно наблюдать в высшей степени индустриальных странах, где люди ведут так называемый постмодернистский образ жизни. В заключение предлагается интерпретация страстного желания индивида созидать жизнь и реальность по-новому и, соответственно, принимать неограниченное участие в тех установленных жизненных стилях, которые создают чувство принадлежности к сфабрикованным реальностям. Такой подход позволяет изучать бессознательные чувства и верования индивида, его социальную и персональную деятельность.

Abstract. I shall start by showing Erich Fromm's particular social psychological approach to the understanding of man. In the main part, a new character type is presented that can be observed particularly in highly industrialized countries where people are devoted to the so-called postmodern way of life. Finally, I shall interpret the meaning of an individual's deep longing for constructing life and reality anew and without any limitations resp. to participate in those enacted life styles that establish a feeling of belonging to those fabricated realities. This will enable me to ask about such an individual's unconscious feelings and beliefs and his or her social and personal functioning.

1. Erich Fromm's Approach to the Understanding of Man

Born in Frankfurt in Germany as the only child of orthodox (living) Jewish parents, Erich Fromm first studied sociology in Heidelberg. There he wrote a dissertation in 1922 on the function of Jewish law in binding together Jews of the Diaspora. Already in his dissertation, Fromm's main interest was a socio-psychological one.

Ever since Fromm became acquainted with psychoanalysis, the question of the social unconscious – the unconscious of societies – was on his mind: those unconscious motivations which bind people together in classes, nations, religious, intellectual or profes-



sional communities; the unconscious drives or attitudes which bring them to think, feel and behave in a similar manner.

Introduced into psychoanalytic ideas by his friend and first wife, Frieda Reichmann, Fromm decided to become a psychoanalyst and was trained at Karl Abraham Psychoanalytic Institute of Berlin. He graduated in 1930 and started to apply psychoanalysis to sociology and to develop his own socio-psychoanalytic approach to understand the interrelationship of the individual and society.

A sociology which does not attempt to recognize the societal within the socialized individual was of no use to Fromm. Neither was he interested in a psychoanalysis which understands the psyche only in terms of the dynamics of drives, rather than through its internalized social expectations. Fromm's main interest was first in making this socio-psychological approach useful to sociology, to help understand developments in society. It was only in the middle of the thirties, however, that Fromm began to use this approach systematically to understand psychoanalytic theory and thus started to criticize Freud's instinct theory.

If one takes seriously the basic sociological premise that there are forces and patterns that are rooted in society itself – a premise that is difficult for most psychoanalysts to accept – then the extremely fertile question can be raised as to whether or not there is something like a social unconscious. If one first accepts the possibility that society has an unconscious which can be called the social unconscious, then the next step is to free oneself from a misguided understanding of the concept of the individual and of society.

Human beings do not just have an "individual psyche" which functions when a person performs as an individual and so becomes the object of psychoanalysis. Rather, the individual must be understood as socialized a priori, and thus the psyche is to be understood as being "developed and determined through the relationship of the individual to society" (Fromm 1929: 28).

According to Fromm, one can distinguish two sorts of experiences the socialized individual is confronted with and that are represented in the passionate strivings of each human being: the "common life experience" and the "individual life experience." In the latter, it is important to know the sibling order or if someone is an only child; sicknesses and traumatic occurrences of an individual sort also are significant because of their strong influence on the psychic and mental development.

On the other hand, the "common life experience" of a group means mainly the economic, social, and political conditions which to a great extent determine the way of life for the group. To understand what is going on in a society or a societal group means to focus one's interest on those psychic aspects that are the outcome of such "common life experiences." According to Fromm, there is no society as such out there, but there are aspects of psychic attitudes, impulses and character formations that are common to many individuals and therefore are representations of society.

Fromm's main interest is in the psychic structure of the human being as a *socialized* being. Thus for him, what is important is an understanding of those passionate strivings and the unconscious of the socialized individual as these factors make themselves evident when the unconscious of society is itself the object of study.



When Fromm embraced the idea of a socially molded unconscious or an unconscious of society by which each individual is to a large extent predetermined, he defined the relationship between individual and society anew. After that it was no longer valid to say “here I am and there is society,” but rather, “much more than instinct oriented psychoanalysis ever assumed I am a reflection of society, in that my unconscious is socially determined and I therefore reflect and realize the secret expectations, requirements, wishes, fears and strivings of society in my own passionate strivings.”

Nevertheless, also for Fromm, human beings are not only representations and reflections of common or individual life experiences. Due to the fact that human beings are gifted with imagination and self-awareness, they are furnished with particular psychic needs that must be satisfied, although they can be satisfied in many different ways. But only inasmuch as they are satisfied in a way that the bodily, mental, spiritual and emotional potentialities are developing, they are conducive to human growth and strength.

According to Fromm, we are furthermore gifted with a deep rooted knowledge about this – as he calls it – “productive” way of satisfying our particular human needs. There is a humanistic conscience, a deep rooted knowing about “a productive orientation” that can get lost or be submerged by the expectations of society or for individual reasons. From this another conflict may arise, not that between individual and society or libidinal wishes and prohibitions of culture, but a conflict between what common life and individual life experiences make us believe we long for *versus* what is in accordance with a productive orientation. Or to put it differently: Most human beings are driven by a conflict between what would serve to make them considered “normal” in terms of society or serves their own neurotic impulses on the one side and what serves human growth and mental health on the other side. In most cases, there is such an antagonism between what is good for the economy and the society versus what is good for human and mental growth.

Fromm himself developed insight into this antagonism by contrasting first the authoritarian and later the marketing social character orientation with the productive character orientation.

After this very condensed theoretical explanation of Fromm’s approach to the understanding of man, I would like to introduce a new, non-productive social character orientation which was first developed after Erich Fromm’s death. I call this as the “Ego-orientation” (Funk 2005, cf. Funk 2004). Although there are some affinities to the “marketing orientation” described by Erich Fromm (cf. Fromm 1947: 67–82; Fromm 1976: 147–151) – the dynamics and aims these two character orientations long for are different. The person with an “Ego-orientation” is not primarily interested in being successful and in selling himself or herself through proper marketing. His or her basic striving is a different one.

2. The Ego-orientation

The “Ego-orientation” is most strongly represented in those age groups and social classes, professions, and lifestyles informed by the so-called postmodern mindset (which should be distinguished from what postmodernism means in philosophy and arts). The postmodern mindset is enormously influenced by the new digital technologies and the boundless possibilities offered by the new media. These make it possible



to create a reality that is new, different, and better than pre-existing reality. The allure of a lifestyle tailored to the individual, an ego-specific orientation, is a central aspect of the present revision of reality.

The Ego-oriented person strives passionately to determine himself or herself freely, spontaneously, and autonomously, unconstrained by provisions or conditions, driven by a desire for a fabricated or artificially produced reality. The decisive motivation is a *desire for a self-determined, Ego-oriented creation of reality*, more specifically, of a context that is self-created as well as a reality of who the individual is – according to the motto “If you don’t make something of yourself, you are nothing!”

According to this description, the Ego-oriented person is neither egotistic nor egocentric nor narcissistic nor subjectivistic nor histrionic. His or her main interest is not to profit nor to exploit others. Occasionally, he or she displays strong egomaniacal traits. But the Ego-oriented person is definitely not narcissistic. He or she is not interested in self-inflation nor in the demonstration or perpetuation of grandiosity, although a blending with narcissism may sometimes be observed.

The conviction informing the person with an Ego-orientation is: “Don’t let anyone tell you who you are. You are who *you* determine to be.” According to this attitude, it is only through the radical Ego-orientation of spontaneous and free self-affirmation and self-dramatization that the authentic and the individual can be experienced. Everything is arbitrary. Everyone and everything can and should be taken lightly, be handled playfully. There is nothing that does not exist, so anything goes. And if anything goes, everything is okay. Nothing exists that isn’t in a state of flux. No one has the right to prescribe what is good or evil, right or wrong, healthy or unhealthy, authentic or false, reality or illusion. The only thing that counts is the Ego-oriented fabrication of reality – in regard to the outer world as well as in regard to the own personality.

There are two variants of this postmodern orientation with its ardent desire for an Ego-oriented construction of reality: an active and a passive type. Similar to Fromm’s distinction between an active (sadistic) and a passive (masochistic) aspect in the authoritarian character orientation, I differentiate between an active Ego-personality type, the man or woman of action, who conceives and stages lifestyles and realities as events, and a passive personality type, the person who passionately participates in staged realities and mass entertainment and spectacles, as a form of association or togetherness with others.

The active person with an Ego-orientation wants to create and proffer a new reality himself or herself; the passive-participative person with an Ego-orientation wants to take part in fabricated reality in self-determined way. He or she chooses the social context, the lifestyle, and the events and experiences appropriate for him or her. The experience of self that is sought differs correspondingly. The passive-participative type wants to be himself or herself by being a part, by being associated, and by having a sense of belonging. “Being connected” frees the individual, as Jeremy Rifkin has formulated in his book *The Age of Access* (2000). As much as the Ego-orientation and commitment are mutually exclusive, as important and central is the experience of being associated, of being a part for the Ego-oriented person.

To better illustrate this new personality type in a psychodynamic way, I will briefly outline several of its most prominent character traits.



a) Action to the Extreme

An initial character trait is an obvious zest for activity, a delight in “doing,” particularly in the *active* type. He or she understands professional activities as a series of projects to be undertaken, and carried out with a high degree of motivation. Moreover, he or she wants to realize himself or herself through work and more often than not totally thrives on work.

What he or she wishes to achieve can also be self-related. His or her typical qualities as a man or woman of action are revealed in the fact that he or she “makes something of himself or herself” and literally creates a new self, personal appearance, image, a new sense of masculinity or femininity through exercise programs, bodybuilding, cosmetic surgery, and personal development courses. The active type also stands out through an inexhaustible fantasy in the stylization of his or her wardrobe.

The *passive-participative* Ego-oriented person is attracted by everything that is fabricated. One possible expression of fabricated activity is that everything takes on the character of an event: the vacation becomes a travel event, the art exhibit an art event, the shopping excursion a shopping event, the church service a religious event, pedagogy a pedagogy of events, etc. Another aspect is the constant need for entertainment. Still another possible expression of being attracted by what is made or fabricated is evident in the participative type’s dependency on stimulants. Nothing is going on without visual or acoustic stimulation, without sparking sexual fantasies, without tempting the tastebuds. Only with the help of such stimulants am I me and do I belong.

b) The Quest for the Dissolution of Boundaries

A particularly typical character trait of the Ego-oriented person is his or her striving for the dissolution of boundaries and the experience of boundlessness (cf. the detailed description of this aspect in Funk 2011). The *active* type clearly demonstrates the wish to liberate himself or herself from all possible restrictions; he or she loves everything that is risky, borderline, boundless, unconventional, extreme, impossible – whether in recreational sports, literature, film, or in vacation activities. Above all he or she wants to experience himself or herself as being sovereign over time and space. Mobility is his or her home; the goal of being on the way is being on the way to no-where. His or her motto is taken from Heraclitus: *panta rei* (everything is in flux).

Boundaries are there to be overcome. Religion and spirituality are means of opening the self toward the inner realm or the realm beyond. Psychotherapy, too, is given a similar significance since it can overcome inner boundaries, or, with the assistance of a “transpersonal psychotherapy,” also overcome boundaries to the beyond. The only dimension of time which is recognized is the moment, the present, the here and now. Everything of duration is deplorable, and the most terrible punishment imaginable is boredom. Another form of conceiving of the ego through dissolving boundaries is the staging of illusionary and fictive realities, in which time and place, finiteness, distress and suffering, failure, and disappointment are things of the past.

The *passive-participative* person with an Ego-orientation also seeks experiences involving the blurring of boundaries yet prefers mass events like open-air concerts, techno parades, or mammoth sporting events. Drugs like alcohol or ecstasy (MDMA) play an essential role when boundaries are blurred in experiences enhancing we-ness.



c) The Need to Exercise Control

A further trait of the Ego-oriented person is his or her need to exercise control and to direct or exert influence. Today in addition to the forces that normally direct business, administration, and social services, we also have the fervent striving of an Ego-oriented person with his or her strong urge to exercise control and exert influence. Knowledge of how something functions and how one can direct, operate, program, influence, control, and utilize something has a tremendous significance for both the *active* and the *passive-participative* personality types. Without the appropriate know-how one is a nobody. Only the person who has everything under control and at his or her disposal in an Ego-oriented way is considered competent.

d) Emotional Intensity and Sentimentality

Another typical character trait concerns emotional life. Feelings are in vogue again; the individual lives emotionally and gives free rein to his or her feelings, whether produced or appropriated – occasionally to such a degree that we can speak of a histrionic incontinence of emotions. The active postmodern person does this differently than the passive-participative person, however.

The *active* person reveals his or her Ego-orientation by displaying his or her emotional intensity, his or her capacity to be sensual and sensitive. Particularly in situations where he or she appears as the director and producer of entertainment, communication, and overdramatizations in everyday life, the active person is successful in manipulating emotions and generating a sentimentality that moves fans to tears, causes them to panic, or to go into raptures. Today whoever hopes for top coverage in the media – as a politician, an actor or actress, a musician, a scholar or scientist – has to enact as well as arouse emotions.

While the active person with an Ego-orientation is a “supplier” of feelings, the *passive-participative* person is the consumer and user of fabricated feelings. The ultimate marketing opportunity in the contemporary production of culture is the offering and selling of emotions. When people feel the feelings offered to them, instead of actually feeling themselves, they are *sentimental*. Sentimentality is thus a trademark of people with an Ego-orientation.

e) Sociability

A final trait to be mentioned here is the sociability of the person having an Ego-orientation. The *active* type is distinctly gregarious, entertaining, interesting, and almost always in a good mood; he or she can talk about others or about himself or herself effortlessly and endlessly and constantly wants to be the center of attention. Sociability takes the place of what has generally been understood as relationship. In actuality, the active person does not comprehend relationship in the sense of emotional commitment and the corresponding feelings of longing, considerateness, obligation, closeness, faithfulness, and togetherness. The active person understands relationship in the sense of casual encounters, convenient or temporary contacts for leisure activities, sexual gratification, or companionship.

Occasionally, the desire for human contact develops into a “relationship project” which is approached unseriously, playfully. Relationships are conceived and experienced as



eventful and unconventional, or they are organized like business contacts. Since the cultivation of contacts replaces traditional emotional commitments, one prominent characteristic of the Ego-oriented person is a lack of enmity and, despite the failure of an acquaintanceship, the capacity to remain friends. Jealousy is usually not an issue. Sexuality means feeling free and being attuned to one's own inclinations and pleasure. Anything and everything is allowed, even sexual abstinence.

Wishes for relationships and contacts that could lead to obligations, expectations of reliability or desires for sustained closeness and intimacy are taboos. This intentional non-commitment entails, on the one hand, a high degree of tolerance and respect for the other as well as of cooperativeness and fairness in dealing with him or her, but, on the other hand, a disinterest in and indifference towards everything that is personally inappropriate or irrelevant.

The *passive-participative* person with the Ego-orientation designs and experiences relationship chiefly as the need to be associated through contacts and to have access to the other in self-determined way. He or she, too, does not wish to commit himself or herself but merely to be loosely associated. Here, too, relationship predominantly means being in contact with as many people as possible, independent of time and space, and securing this private network of potential contacts. Relationship is replaced by (the) contact; the shaping of relationship is replaced by the shaping and securing of association through the cultivation of contacts.

Here this brief description must be sufficient to give some idea of what is to be understood by the active and the passive Ego-orientation. I have consciously tried to remain on the descriptive level. In the following, I would like to look behind the scenes of this new character orientation and explore its operative inner psychodynamics.

3. The Psychodynamics of the Ego-orientation

According to Erich Fromm, the developed and mature human being is the human being who forms his or her life out of his or her own inner powers which make him or her relatively independent from external means of dealing with life and from other human beings. Fromm calls these personal inner powers of growth the human being's "own human powers" or "productive forces" because they can only be "led forward" (*producere*) from the human being through practice. Through their use, that is, through their practice a productive orientation and a syndrome of growth arises; if, however, they are not regularly practiced or if their practice is discontinued, a nonproductive orientation or a syndrome of decay arises (see Fromm 1947: 82–107, Fromm 1964: 113f).

As much as these individual inner powers enable the human being to be free, independent, rational, loving, capable of experience, daring, trusting, and open for the new, and as much as they enable the human being to recognize not only the positive but also the negative aspects, to learn to live with criticism and disappointment, and to think, feel, and act given the forces and constraints of reality – these inner powers are just as contingent on being used or put into practice. Whoever is unwilling to face a disappointing reality and constantly chooses to flee into illusory virtual worlds loses the ability to think, feel, and act in accordance with reality. And only someone, who "practices" his or her ability to love and actually approaches the other, can grow in his or her capacity for love and prevent himself or herself from becoming incapable of love.



Against the background of this understanding of productive orientation as the practice or utilization of human inner powers the question naturally arises how persons with an Ego-orientation actually use these individual inner powers. For many people the main attraction of the present-day art of living lies in being able to shape a surrounding reality and individual realities that are new, different, more impressive, more competent, more exciting, more colorful, and more entertaining, however, not through the utilization of our own human abilities but through the utilization of the products that we have created. This possibility of reliance on fabrications has increased infinitely through digital technology and the electronic media. Today the human being is capable of achieving much more if he or she does not rely on his or her individual human abilities but on the abilities of his or her products, that is, the capabilities of technology and techniques, operational devices and measures, manuals, and programs.

Using “fabricated” ability instead of practicing “human” ability and strengthening the productive human powers risks increasingly alienating oneself from one’s own human powers. The psychically relevant changes occur above all in areas which up to now were exclusively or almost exclusively regulated through the implementation of *human* abilities: in the area of the individual personality and in the area of social existence. The digital technology and electronic media have also made totally new developments in *psychotechniques* and *sociotechniques* possible. Following the widespread collapse of traditional systems of order, these offer, so to speak, the urgently required “operating systems” and “software” for personality development and the organization of social life.

Courses in personality development and similar programs in management assist in the optimization of self-perception and personal willpower, the refinement of social competencies, the improvement of perception and communication, the ability to resolve conflicts, the capacity to learn, and the appropriation of leadership qualities.

What psychotechniques achieve in the area of personality development is what sociotechniques make possible in the area of social existence and the organization of the social. Today almost everything is somehow linked with the concepts “direction,” “program,” or “management.” The inflationary use of the concepts “management” and “program” makes clear that the human being is no longer the directing subject in the construction of reality but that it is the programs and the directional and operational measures and their intrinsic ability which direct the human being. Even the managers of a company are rarely its “directors” anymore. Their power and responsibility are generally expressed through selecting measures that will direct and operate the company and through administering and coordinating the implementation of these measures.

In order to demonstrate this consequential change in subject in the postmodern construction of reality, I will not only speak of “technical” as opposed to “human” ability but also of “fabricated” or “made” ability. What I mean is an ability that *actively* arises from the product. The double meaning of both fabricated and made is intended and welcome: whoever relies on fabricated or made ability corresponds to the postmodern Ego-oriented person displaying an extreme preoccupation with “doing,” “making,” or “acting,” yet his or her modes of expression additionally have the semblance of the “fabricated” or the “made,” the suggested, the synthetic, the artificial, the simulated. Whoever counts on “fabricated” ability has “fabricated” feelings as well. He or she impresses with a “fabricated” personality; his or her experience of relationship is directed by “fabricated” interactions, and the children’s upbringing is not that of the father or the



mother but that “fabricated” by child-rearing manuals (and carried out by the parents).

The conflict between “fabricated” and human possibilities for constructing reality today mainly results from pressures to conform to a capitalist economic system which offers and sells realities (in the guise of lifestyles, eventful experiences, and means of coping) with the intention of making the use of human powers superfluous by suggesting the total superiority of fabricated and appropriated reality. The more successful it is, the more likely it is that the Ego-oriented persons will try to use “fabricated” reality to conceal their weak points. Such an economy has succeeded in determining the fate of the human being: bound in networks, bound umbilically, and bound and fed intravenously with “fabricated” ability.

I would like to mention a possible misunderstanding that may arise given my critical stance toward this new character orientation. Although society and economy require the psychic structure of the Ego-oriented person in order to function and thus attempt to influence the human being to deny and replace human ability with fabricated ability, “co-existence” and cooperation between fabricated and human ability are also conceivable. Here I mean that a person can very well make use of the fascinating possibilities of made ability in order to substantially increase and expand (and not to replace) his or her own human ability.

Such a use of made ability can be observed, for example, with many artists and in creative professions as well as elsewhere. Whoever rejects computer technology or the artistic possibilities of synthesized music or the digitalized operation of production processes, he or she also rejects captivating possibilities for broadening his or her human abilities. Whether one employs made ability for the heightening of his or her human ability or replaces human ability with “fabricated” ability can be established relatively easily. We only have to imagine what happens if we cannot make use of made ability because the personal computer has crashed, the television set has given up the “ghost,” or the electronic technology in the car goes on strike. Whoever feels like a nobody or is bored to death has obviously sacrificed his or her human ability to “fabricated” ability.

This leads me to an attempt at a psychoanalytic interpretation of the Ego-orientation. I will begin with a number of striking observations made in dealing with persons having this new character orientation.

Initially, the overemphasis on the spontaneous, totally independent and self-determined production of reality is noticeable, the most precious commodity of the Ego-oriented person. At times, almost the manic rejection of provisions, conditions, restrictions, and dependencies belongs to the creed of the Ego-orientation and contrasts starkly with the real but unconscious dependency on the instruments of animation.

Also prominent is the fact that all feelings of personal weakness and limitation – that is, feelings of helplessness, passiveness, powerlessness, and isolation – are avoided and denied by the person with Ego-orientation. The Ego-oriented people have a problem with commitment which is accompanied by an increasing loss of individual feelings of love, longing, faithfulness, closeness, affection, etc., and is compensated for by an increased need for contact and control, on the one hand, and by “fabricated” feelings, on the other hand.



The problem of commitment corresponds to a clearly recognizable problem with separation. Conflicts as well as critical and aggressive feelings arising from conflicts are to a great degree intentionally overlooked and eliminated but not resolved through misrepresentation, positive thinking (respectively feeling), or “painless” separation (with compensation).

Equally striking is the decrease in important Ego functions such as the ability to control impulses, to test reality, to tolerate frustration, to perceive ambivalences, often leading to the escape into illusionary realities – according to the motto: choose another project and enter a new reality.

Another unique feature of the Ego-orientation is the generally counterphobic reaction to the structural affects of fear, guilt, and shame. Instead of being afraid, the Ego-person seeks thrills; instead of admitting weaknesses, he or she displays excessive self-confidence; instead of being ashamed, he or she takes delight in staring at the object of his or her shamelessness.

Since these affects are not available for Superego and Ego ideal formation, central functions of the Superego and the Ego ideal are weakened. This is why persons with an Ego-orientation feel threatened when they have to stand up for predetermined norms and obligations. The dependency of many Ego-oriented persons on internalized norms and ideals is not only evident in their proverbial cynicism but in a compensation through increased dependency on groups and institutions that offer to provide fabricated idealism (for example, in the form of ethics boards or political correctness).

How one can explain these very different impacts of the Ego-orientation? What is conscious and what is the unconscious reality? And what must not become conscious?

Consciously the Ego-oriented person feels omnipotent, without any restriction and limitation. All is possible, and also the impossible is possible – with the help of techniques, management programs or other “fabricated” abilities and illusions or – if you are born again – with the help of Jesus. This conscious feeling of unlimited Ego-potency is only possible if the persons do not become aware of how dependent they are on all these fabricated abilities and that they are nothing and totally powerless, empty, weak, passive, lifeless and without any “anima,” if they are not constituted by the animation of fabricated abilities, that is to say, if they are not “re-animated.” The Ego-oriented characters feel unconsciously totally dependent and without vitality, and it is this unconscious dependence and lifelessness that makes them seek (for) self-determination, feel positive and become addicted to events and happenings and all that which is active in order not to get aware of their unconscious feelings.

The repression of those feelings has to be very strong. Only a deep-reaching defense mechanism can make the Ego-oriented person sure that he will not be confronted with his dependency and emptiness. It is therefore not surprising that the Ego-oriented person seeks a symbiosis with the fabricated abilities of his or her products by a (projective) identification with the fabricated abilities.

Because the contemporary human being is constantly confronted with the inadequacy and disgracefulness of one's own powers and ego competencies in comparison with the greater effectiveness of “made” and “fabricated” ability, one denies one's own human ability and projects it onto objects capable of greater achievement – onto capabilities



and techniques or technologies created by the human being. Now one concentrates totally on discovering how the machines, the (software) programs, the operational mechanisms, the staging techniques, the program for customer relations, personality development courses, media-assisted presentations, etc. can construct and shape reality for him or her.

In utilizing the competencies of his or her products the Ego-oriented person causes them to be creative and to construct reality, a creativity that does not have anything more at all to do with his or her own human ability. In a projective way he or she has “housed” his or her human ability in “made” ability, and can then, as observer and agent, as user and as man or woman of action, experience what “made” ability can do.

From a psychoanalytic point of view, the Ego-oriented person’s deep longing for constructing life and reality anew so as to participate in those enacted life styles that establish a feeling of belonging to those fabricated realities is to be interpreted as a desperate attempt to cope with an unconscious feeling of inner emptiness, lifelessness and powerlessness, that is to say, with an Ego-weakness and a disappearing sense of identity.

This all does not mean that Ego-oriented people are *suffering*. The basic idea of the dynamic concept of character, as Freud developed it, is that personality traits *independent of their usefulness for the person in question* can be accepted and realized in an ego-syntonic way without feelings and symptoms that make one suffer. Sociologically speaking, the social character orientation contributes to the perception of seeing oneself as normal. Psychologically speaking, normality can, however, be pathological and contribute to the development of mental illness. A social character orientation detrimental to mental health leads to what Fromm has called a “pathology of normalcy.”

In *The Sane Society* Fromm writes: “The fact that millions of people share the same vices does not make these vices virtues, the fact that they share so many errors does not make the errors to be truths, and the fact that millions of people share the same forms of mental pathology does not make these people sane” (Fromm 1955: 15).

The prevalence of such “socially patterned defects” (*ibid.*) allows many people to see their addictive behavior (for example, an obsession with work, a buying compulsion, or a nicotine dependency) as socially acceptable and normal, enabling them to avoid seeing themselves as “mentally ill.” This is why character traits leading to mental illness such as the denial of dependencies or the shameless exposure of other people’s shortcomings do not cause psychological distress but strengthen the feeling of the individual “of fitting in with the rest of mankind – *as he knows them*. As a matter of fact, his very defect may have been raised to a virtue by his culture, and thus may give him an enhanced feeling of achievement” (Fromm 1955: 15).

The psychoanalytic understanding of the postmodern Ego-orientation unquestionably shows that what is good for an economy and what is normal in a society, namely, to substitute human abilities by selling and using of “fabricated” abilities, is not at all good for the human being and his or her mental health. Nevertheless, as long as the Ego-oriented persons are supplied with the “medications” enabling them to avoid perceiving feelings of emptiness, boredom or lifelessness, they will function well and can avoid developing symptoms that make them suffer. He or she only suffers from a “pathology of normalcy.”



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