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Learning to Be Creative Impressions from the Erich Fromm Seminary in Pécs

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During the last ten years I offered to my students at the University of Pécs five seminars dealing with several aspects of Erich Fromm's oeuvre. The topics were on three main subjects: (1) Being confronted with present day problems: Erich Fromm and our modern world; (2) the particular German ideas in Fromm's oeuvre; (3) the continuity and discontinuity of German history of ideas and culture from Kant to Habermas.

The focuses were varying in these courses according to the changing political and cultural situation in Hungary and due to the specific interests of the students. My short report on these seminars refers to the students being attracted as well by the questions Fromm arises as the answers he gives and that Fromm was stimulating to the students to think about their own way, e.g. to think and live in a critical and self-reflexive way.

After the political change in Hungary and being freed from the former authoritarian political and economical system the students were confronted with the new freedom and to ask for its relevance. Particularly the question arose whether the new realm of freedom will also be in favor to establish a better, more human and democratic society. In the mood of the radical political changes also the Hungarian students

had some problems to find their own position. Fromm's critical and correct diagnosis of capitalism and socialism presented in *The Sane Society* were a supportive theoretical and historical background for the students to understand the dichotomies inherent in the market oriented system of economy as well as in the multi party system.

Due to the priority of economical requirements and the battles between the political parties and their increasing egotistical tendencies in Hungarian society more and more young Hungarians lost and are losing the readiness to actively participate in humane changes of the present social and cultural conditions in Hungary. They more and more prefer to shape their private life in a meaningful and successful way. They like to invest their own capacities exclusively and productively in their private life affairs. Also Hungarian students primarily want to be the „artists of their life”. By this they refer to Fromm's philosophy of love and religions as important guidelines.

A minor part of the students intend to become teachers after having finished their study. Being pedagogs they understand their educational profession to be a means to positively mould character traits of future generation. Erich Fromm's pedagogical impulses will encourage them by doing their job as



educator.

Fromm's paradoxical and sometimes provoking ideas in regard to social health and illnesses as well as in regard to the question of normality in modern society are challenging for my students. Being young and open minded students are very interested in what is new. They have an inclination towards being adapted to the Zeitgeist. Fromm's critical attitude toward the dominant and seducing marketing character orientation evoked many controversial discussions about the spiritual and mental disorders that are resulting from this marketing orientation that only seems to be freely and by one's own decision making chosen. Discussing Fromm's analysis the students discovered affectively the hidden pitfall of the marketing orientation. Being soon employees they reacted with ambivalent feelings to the increasing work pressure of the market economy. For them the impact is as well blessing as curse.

The daily acid test and competition at the labor market are valued by two third of the students as a challenge to develop their abilities. They look at the conformism of their personality as being a necessary requirement. About one third of the students of my seminar value the requirement for a permanent new performance of their personality in the first line as a threatening lost of their personality and not as a chance for becoming perfect. The more sensible students are suspicious that they will not withstand the increasing stress.

These feelings of fear and the escape of the new risky possibilities of freedom seem to be the reason why more than one third of the Hungarian students are not looking forward trustfully to what the future will bring to them; rather they are stressed and feel powerless and depressed being confronted with their professional future.

In regard to the alternative „prosperity“ or „well-being“ the students were impressed by Fromm's concept of psychic needs. They agree

to Fromm's thesis that one has to satisfy the psychic as well as the physiological needs in order to live a meaningful life.

Also Erich Fromm's interests in ecological topics were discussed in the seminar. His concern in regard to the future and his ideas about biophilia as a necessary precondition for a sustainable development were not only fully agreed by the students of Pécs but they stimulated also the willingness to actively participate in a surrounding that is loving and furthering life.

Due to Fromm's contributions to the German history of philosophy und culture my students got an answer to one of the basic questions of German history of culture. The question was discussed how the persecution and annihilation of millions of harmless people could develop in Germany - a country were besides others Lessing, Kant, Goethe and Thomas Mann were promoting humanistic ideas and were engaged in a humanistic way of life. By Fromm's analysis of authoritarian and necrophilic character orientations my students did find a convincing answer to a most difficult problem of German history in the 20th century.

The encouraged and visionary answers given by Fromm stimulated the students of the Erich Fromm seminar of Pécs to a critical attitude while reflecting the so called intact world and the more and more One World and simultaneously enabled them to take care to overcome unhealthy and socially unjust conditions in our globalized world.

My student's creative and deep going reception of Fromm's humanistic and biophilic concepts was supported tremendously by the International Erich Fromm Society and its generous donations of books, audio- and video tapes. On the occasion of the 20th anniversary of the International Erich Fromm Society me and the students of the Erich Fromm seminar of the university of Pécs want to thank you so much.