

Erich Fromm's Humanistic Approach and Its Potential for Increasing the Importance of Peace Psychology in the Public Debate

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1. Introduction¹: The split of the peace movement and reflections on the psychology of peace in the face of war in Europe

The war that broke out in 2022 in the middle of Europe is particularly challenging and burdensome for those who have their roots in the peace movement; and who, as members of more left-wing or progressive camps, position themselves against nationalist and autocratic movements; and who, in principle, consider dialogue based on mutual respect as a medium of negotiation between different interests to be the right solution.

The fact that Germany, for example, is not allowed to supply weapons to war zones has been at the core of this basic position for many years. With the invasion of Russian troops into the territory of Ukraine on February 24, this position began to waver; not only among large parts of the German government with its Social Democratic chancellor, but also for a foreign minister from the Green Party. A narrative that it was necessary to supply Ukraine with weapons for self-defense in order to defend democracy also gained ground in large parts of the public. Central goals and values that had been fought for within the peace movement and left-wing initiatives were suddenly called into question.

This can be symbolically illustrated by an interview conducted with Hans-Christian Ströbele in May 2022 by editors of the influential *Spiegel* mag-

1 This is a slightly revised and extended version of the manuscript of my presentation at the Erich Fromm Study Center's doctoral seminar, given on 9/14/22. I thank all participants for discussion and helpful comments. My special thanks are due to Rainer Funk for his review of the manuscript and his active support in the correct citation based on English-language sources of Erich Fromm's work.

azine (Spiegel Online 2022). Ströbele was a Green Party member of the German Bundestag from 1985 to 1987 and from 1998 to 2017 and was always considered to belong to the left-wing spectrum. Ströbele was a fierce critic of NATO's bombing of Serbian targets in 1999 and the associated support of the German government, which included his party colleague Joschka Fischer as foreign minister.

In this interview, Ströbele explains that after some hesitation he came to the conclusion that, deviating from the original Green program, it was right to supply Ukraine with weapons. At the same time, it becomes clear how divided Ströbele is internally in this moment: for example, he only considers the delivery of defensive weapons to be the right thing to do. He differentiates between anti-tank weapons and tanks, which he strictly opposes the delivery of. In doing so, he sets himself apart from the course taken by his fellow party members and the German government. He calls for a renunciation of war rhetoric and points to the danger of escalation associated with the delivery of «offensive weapons.» Asked about his party colleague Anton Hofreiter, who has spoken out vehemently in favor of the increased supply of weapons to Ukraine, he expresses his lack of understanding and points to the disastrous consequences that could be associated with this:

«When I follow his statements in the media, I just sit there and think: Toni, do you know what you risk with your demands? Whoever supplies weapons is responsible for what happens to them.» (Ströbele 2022; translation TK.)

At the same time, Ströbele concedes when asked if not supplying weapons also involves responsibility. Ströbele himself succumbed to a protracted illness in August, just a few months after the interview and after deliberately avoiding life-sustaining measures.

This interview is just one of many examples that can be used to show that the formerly strong peace movement, which was largely united regarding arms deliveries and the distanced stance on participation in wars, is divided.

In these times, it is not easy to find one's own position that is free of doubts and occasional thoughts pointing in different directions. In conjunction with the day-by-day renewal of horror stories of new war deaths and increasing threats — for example, from attacks on the energy supply infrastructure or from the possible use of nuclear weapons — this can be demoralizing. In view of this threat of demoralization, however, I believe it is extremely important to counter this danger of inner resignation and retreat by increasingly addressing the effects of war on us as human beings and the alternatives that exist.

The question of how peace can be created and how peace can be worked toward must not be lost from view. In particular, a humanistic psychology founded on the work of Erich Fromm must not be satisfied with, nor naturalize, people becoming numbers like pawns, counted in terms of loss in the power struggle between camps.

This includes, in particular, remaining sensitive to how war is discussed in societies that are not directly involved in the armed conflict. This is not only about positions as such, but also about how other positions are referred to and what words are used to describe acts of war and their consequences.

It is indisputable that war leads to extreme suffering. People are killed by others whom they do not know personally. This killing itself is only an abstract description for concrete situations in which people burn to death, bleed to death, or are mutilated under extreme suffering. People have to watch how fellow human beings suffer at their side and are wiped out by modern technology. War is always associated with extreme cruelty; for example, when power is used to torture to death or rape people who are assigned to the «enemy» camp. Survivors may themselves have killed others in the logic of war; they had to kill others, or they experienced how others, at whose side they had stood, had done so. In addition to these psychological war damages, there are physical ones, such as the loss of limbs. Affected are not only those on the battlefield, but entire societies — most clearly visible, certainly, in the mothers and fathers that lose their children in one blow, children whom they have raised for decades and for whom they have had sleepless nights. Brothers and sisters who survive, but suddenly can only remember their siblings in photographs.

But all of this can be made invisible or fade out in the coverage of the war, when, as in the live ticker of a soccer match, the priority is on which side has just made gains in terrain. For example, in *Bild Online*, one of the most widely read tabloid media in Germany, the headline above a close-up of a tank on Sept. 26, 2022 read, ««Beautiful German cat» German cheetah (Gepard) tank fights Donetsk free.»² Suffering and death are not addressed; rather, war appears in the meaning horizon of beautiful elegance with the image of the cat — and associated with national pride. Instead of compassion for young people who have been killed, the joy of a strategically successful operation dominates, resembling the jubilation over a goal in a soccer match. It is not only in the tabloid press that such a tendency of reporting oriented primarily to power games can be found; examples are omnipresent. For example, today, on October 2, 2022, a report in *Der Spiegel*, which is actually embedded in the

2 Translation by me, in the original: ««Schöne deutsche Katze» Deutscher Gepard-Panzer kämpft Donezk frei.»

context of a live ticker on the Ukraine war, says: «For ten seconds, President Selenskyj speaks out in a video. He has good news for his countrymen. (...) 12:24 p.m.: Only ten seconds long was the video that President Selenskyj posted on his official Telegram channel. There was only one message to announce, and that was that the town of Lyman was «completely cleared» of Russian forces» (translation TK). After the insertion of an advertisement from Tchibo with the text «Discover everything for garden & balcony. Shop now!» (translation TK) it continues with, among other things, the news item «10:33 a.m.: In the retreat from Lyman, the Russians have suffered heavy losses, according to British intelligence» (translation TK).

If readers are not careful, there is a danger that they will be too quick to cheer along in the joy of seeing autocrat Putin, leader of Russia, meet resistance to his aspirations. That people are content to dismiss this as good news — forgetting all too quickly that this news means that many young people have died cruelly; young people who remain invisible, as well as faceless and nameless in all these reports, not even mentioned or quantified in their magnitude. This in sharp contrast to the precision with which, in the sense of a «live ticker», the news is given as «12:24 a.m.» even to the minute.

Particularly in view of the split of the peace movement, and an ever more widespread narrative that armament and the unconditional willingness to go to war are needed in our time in order to defend freedom and democracy, there is a need to strengthen peace psychological perspectives.

My friend and colleague, Phil Langer, gave his inaugural lecture at IPU Berlin on February 2, 2017, entitled «Social as Peace Psychology. On the Necessary Updating of a Research Program.» (Langer 2017).³ In his discussion of social psychology, he notes with disillusionment the lack of thematic entries on «war» or «peace» in widely used textbooks in the field. He relates this to the prevailing paradigm of experimental-quantitative studies under controlled laboratory conditions, which cannot systematically capture the complexity of diffuse, historically and culturally determined conflict dynamics «in the real world out there»; therefore, these themes have to be excluded from the realm of what can be meaningfully researched. This has quite serious consequences, as Langer sums up:

«Cum grano salis, social psychology is silent on questions of war and peace. This extensive silence is fatal. The discipline loses its socio-political relevance. This is precisely what needs to be changed.» (Langer 2019, p. 83; translation TK.)

3 A slightly revised version was published in 2019 in the anthology «Psychoanalytisch denken» (Psychoanalytic Thinking) by Christine Kirchoff et al. (Langer 2019).

Especially with regard to currently pressing questions of war and peace, institutionalized social psychology offers few and little meaningful answers. I ask myself: Where is psychology today in the public debates about warlike conflicts in the world? Although it would not be appropriate to accuse it of total invisibility, it does not seem to me to have the voice it could have — nor to raise the voice it should raise⁴. I don't only want to point at others here, but explicitly include myself.

Yet social psychology, by its very nature, has much to say — psychoanalytic social psychology especially can and must take a stand on the rampant irrationality in society and politics — both in relation to individuals and collectives. According to Langer, it is essential for psychoanalytic social psychology to intervene in a well-founded and loud way in current international political debates on problems and conflicts. As the following quote from Langer makes clear, the field of peace psychology is too broad to show in a single article Erich Fromm's multifaceted contribution to the related issues (e.g. Johach 2013). At the same time, a necessarily limited focus on references provided by Fromm helps to sharpen contemporary peace psychology perspectives.

«What might be a genuinely social psychological task is to investigate, theoretically as well as empirically, why people sometimes respond so quickly and enthusiastically to the call of war and find it so hard to stomach the idea of peace; how it is that people come to embrace strange misanthropic worldviews and go into battle for such weird ideas as the nation, the people, or an event that happened centuries ago; but also how, under conditions of everyday chronicled violence, people do not lose their fellow humanity, stand up for each other and work for a better life for the next generations, of which they themselves will have nothing.» (Langer 2019, p. 80; translation TK.)

It is in this sense that I make this contribution, which is about Fromm's humanistic approach and its potential for increasing the importance of peace psychology in the public debate. This is meant to be a thought-provoking and spotlight piece and not to formulate a self-contained program of peace psychology. Since Erich Fromm's work represents an almost inexhaustible source in this sense, I will try to point out some aspects that seem to me to be particularly important

4 One exception is social psychologist Harald Welzer, who has been very present in television discussions following a letter he co-signed to the German chancellor and, together with Richard D. Precht, has critically examined the role of the media in reporting on the war in a recently published book (Precht / Welzer 2022).

in the current world situation; while I can, out of necessity, go into less detail on other considerations that are also significant.

Following the humanistic psychoanalysis founded by Fromm, I will first deal with the basic conditions of human existence and the human forms of aggression connected with it; after which, I will discuss subsequent reflections on the nature of war and peace. From a peace-psychological perspective, I will illuminate the chances for a «revolution of hope» — of which Fromm spoke in 1968 — before concluding with a discussion of what, based on Fromm's work, seems to be important for me in the near future for peace psychology and for new empowerment of a collective peace movement.

2. The significance of Fromm for a humanistic-psychoanalytic peace psychology

Before his migration to the USA, Erich Fromm conducted a large-scale and important study in Germany; the study was carried out in 1930 but not published until 1980 (Fromm 1980a) under the title «Arbeiter und Angestellte am Vorabend des Dritten Reichs» (Workers and Employees on the Eve of the Third Reich; the English version was subsequently published with the title «*The Working Class in Weimar Germany. A Psychological and Sociological Study*»). The survey was based on a questionnaire with many open-ended questions. In it, question 429 was «In your opinion, how can a new world war be prevented?»

Unfortunately, this question still seems frighteningly timely to us today, almost 100 years later.

Regarding the answers, Erich Fromm summarizes:

«The phrasing of this question was really related to the experience of World War I, the consequences of which still overshadowed life in Germany at the time of our survey. Most respondents, however, understood the question in a wider sense, i.e. as one asking about the possibility of avoiding war in general and so investigated our unspoken assumptions that it was basically possible to prevent wars. Some rejected this hypothesis, while others explicitly agreed with it. The answers were thus necessarily influenced by different views about the nature of war. (...) For the *conservatives* war is indeed an iron necessity, grounded in human nature, the greatest test of the strength of a nation and the ultimate means to solve international conflicts. The conservative hypothesis that war is unavoidable was adopted even more strongly by National Social-

ists and Fascists, although in other areas there existed large ideological differences between them and the conservatives.

Socialist theory conceives of war as the necessary consequence of the capitalist organization of society, as the result of the opposed interests of strong economic groups which are in competition with one another. Seen from this point of view, war can only be avoided through a social order based on an internationally planned economy, and action by the workers, perhaps in the form of a general strike, is seen as a first step in this direction. The *liberal* philosophy disagrees with the Marxists that there is a necessary connection between capitalism and war and views war as an atavistic matter, a superfluous relic from the prehistory of mankind. Those taking this position hope that war can be prevented by the spread of pacifist ideas; at the same time they believe that a rational way of dealing with international conflicts is possible, for example through international courts, treaties or the League of Nations. Examples of this point of view are answers such as *International agreements*, *Conscientious objection*, *Pacifist education* or *Moral improvement of man.*» (Fromm 1980a, pp. 92 f.)

This brief excerpt from the study alone shows a depth of reflection that is missing in many contributions by contemporary politicians, journalists, and social scientists. It is certainly also clear that the question of how to prevent wars is linked to different worldviews and political constellations. It is not an exclusively psychological question and yet psychology makes important contributions in answering it (Pilisuk 2015). First of all, psychology offers an approach to questioning the nature of the violence associated with wars.

In his opus magnum *The Anatomy of Human Destructiveness*, published in 1973, Erich Fromm deals in detail with the question of destructiveness.⁵ Fromm calls the thesis that wars are «caused by innate human destructiveness» as «plainly absurd» (Fromm 1973a, p. 210). In contrast to the late work of Freud, Fromm denies the existence of a death drive. He generally distinguishes different forms of aggression, all of which he relates to a specifically human existence, as he has already elaborated and described in detail in works such as *The Sane Society* (Fromm 1955a).

Fromm points out the starting point of the ambiguity of human existence. For, according to Fromm, human beings lack instinctive adaptability and physi-

5 At this point I do not want to and cannot offer a summary, but only excerpts of lines of thought that seem to me to be particularly important for a peace psychology perspective from a humanistic psychology perspective.

cal strength. At birth, a human being is the «the most helpless animal» (Fromm 1955a, p. 23) that needs protection longer than all others. At the same time, he is ahead of all other animals by the extent of his ability to think and to develop ideas. His actions are therefore clearly less determined than those of other living beings. Humans are therefore social beings and integrated into societies. How an individual human being develops depends to a large extent on these forms of being integrated. Peacefulness can be promoted, as well as destructiveness; for example, in the form of sadism, necrophilia and reactive forms of aggression.

Sadistic forms of aggression focus on the experience of omnipotence over people and things, which can be associated with destruction, torment, and torture (see Fromm 1970h, p. 250). It is a non-productive, destructive way of satisfying the need for oneness that arises as a drive from human existence. If humans already experienced themselves as powerless to create living things, they were, in any case, capable of destroying the living.

Human destructiveness, moreover, Fromm associates with necrophilia, the «attraction by all that is dead, which is decay, disease, non-life, non-growth, and the merely mechanical» (Ibid., p. 251). He contrasts necrophilia with biophilia, which is characteristic of people who «take a special pleasure in everything that lives, that grows, that has structure, that forms, that is not mechanical»⁶ (Ibid.).

I will come back to this later, but first I would like to discuss the form of aggression Fromm calls «reactive,» which also exists in animals, but which is much greater in humans as a consequence of the specifically human condition of existence; for humans foresee dangers that could only possibly arise in the future but are already experienced as a threat in the present. People develop a conception of self that is symbolically anchored and linked to values. An attack on such symbols and values would also be experienced as an attack on their own vital interests.

From this, Fromm derives a specifically human vulnerability of human beings: on the one hand, they can be persuaded that their vital interests are threatened, although this is not the case at all. On the other hand, there is the danger that they create idols to which they enslave themselves:

«Enslavement to idols at a certain level is the condition of his mental equilibrium. Any attack on these idols is felt as an attack on his vital

6 This German language publication is based on a lecture given by Erich Fromm during the «Salzburger Humanismusgespräche» (Salzburg Humanism Talks). Since there is no English translation yet, all quotations referring to this source have been translated by me.

interests. Not only what we usually call idols in the Old Testament is to be thought of, (...), but the idols we worship today, the idols of ideologies, the idols of state sovereignty, of nation, of race, of religion, of freedom, of socialism, of democracy, of maximum consumption, of organization, and so on.» (Fromm 1970h, pp. 248 f.)

In historical retrospect, Fromm sees precisely in these perceived threats linked to idolatry one of the main causes of the emergence of hostility and destructiveness and one of the main driving forces of human aggressiveness.

In addition to understanding sadistic and necrophilous tendencies, it is precisely the knowledge of this human reactive aggression from a social-psychological perspective that is important for dealing with the current world situation and the public discourse on war and peace; for the defense of democracy, in particular, is repeatedly invoked as a justification both for one's own direct or indirect participation in armed conflict and for increasing rearmament.

Of course, Fromm is no opponent of democracy. In sharp words, however, he draws attention to how dangerous an unreflective, black-and-white painting is in terms of democracy vs. no democracy and to how much the concept of democracy invites abuse and brainwashing, as in the sense of idolatry.

This is precisely why there is a need for a psychology that addresses questions of war and peace without rushing to judgements and without merely repeating phrases that divide the world into camps before taking a well-founded look at the fundamentals of human existence and human relationships. Fromm himself points out that:

«...we need for the theory of peace a much more developed theory of man, a humanistic-dynamic anthropology or — very specifically — a humanistic psychoanalysis.» (Fromm 1970h, p. 251.)

This is reiterated by Rainer Funk. In the accompanying commentaries to the complete German Fromm edition (Vol. 5, p. 441; translation TK), he writes:

«Fromm's involvement in the peace movements and peace initiatives (...) is an attempt to perform the function of a therapist in the social and political sphere, where a society threatens to fall prey to the madness of atomic self-destruction. A further analysis of the way Fromm as a psychoanalyst responded to this concrete political challenge (his solidarization and his mode of argumentation) could contribute much to a model that imagines the political responsibility and political engagement of psychoanalysis.»

With this in mind, I would like to attempt in the following sections to sound out what challenges are currently posed for peace psychology and to offer a more peace psychology-based critical engagement with political currents that, in the name of democracy, support participation in wars and promote increasing rearmament.

3. Symbolic meanings of war and peace and the need for a revolution of hope

It is not only the question of human aggression and destructiveness that requires a social psychological examination, but also the question of war and peace. Langer elaborates in his inaugural lecture that the concept of war is not clearly anchored and that we actually do not know «what we are talking about when we call something war» (Langer 2017). The fact that the term, similar to that of democracy, can be symbolically charged in very different ways becomes very clear in light of the way the confrontation between Ukraine and Russia is being talked about. In Germany, for example, the term «Angriffskrieg» («war of aggression») is very widespread; it is already made clear by the term itself who is the aggressor — and thus evil — and who is the good being attacked. Such a designation makes it easier for people to continue to be against war, or even to demonstrate against it, but at the same time continue to support arms deliveries. In Russia, on the other hand, the term «special operation» is used, and the use of the term «war» is seen as a punishable offense — as if it were a legitimate action by a state institution, such as the police against a gang of criminals. This, too, is intended to make one's own destructiveness appear not as such, but as justified under the guise of an imagined threat.

Fromm distinguishes between a positive and a negative definition of peace. Accordingly, in the negative sense, peace means non-war or the non-use of violence to achieve goals; in the positive sense, it means a state of «fraternal harmony of all men» and harmony of humans with nature, accompanied by the full development of his reason and capacity for love⁷. The word «shalom», which is used in the Old Testament for peace, expresses in its meaning wholeness, harmony, and completeness, similar to this idea of positive peace (see Fromm 1970h, p. 243).

Although in the long run only peace in the positive sense represents a

7 In a similar way, Marc Pilisuk (2015, p. 153) understands peace in a positive meaning, as an environment in which the fulfillment of the human potential of some does not come at the expense of others.

lasting and sustainable peace, according to Fromm, it is important to develop strategies under the given social conditions; since in the atomic age, in view of the threat of total destruction, one has too little time to wait until humans and society change substantially (Ibid., p. 252).

«What we need at the moment is a breathing space in which humanity can come to its senses, in which the humanistic forces can work, in which warnings can be given about the dangers and new visions can be pointed out. We have the advantage that we can appeal to a tradition which reaches from the prophets to the present and which is not yet dead, and that this longing for life and for the realization of human substance is present today in all classes and ages.» (Fromm 1970h, pp. 256 f.)

If, in this sense, it is first about the achievement of peace in the negative sense, in the meaning of non-war, the legitimate question arises whether the increasing armament as a form of deterrence does not achieve exactly this. Fromm doubts this and points to psychological consequences, not for individuals, but for a changed character of society:

«To live for any length of time under the constant threat of destruction creates certain psychological effects in most human beings — fright, hostility, callousness, a hardening of the heart, and a resulting indifference to all the values we cherish. Such conditions will transform us into barbarians — though barbarians equipped with the most complicated machines. If we are serious in claiming that our aim is to preserve freedom (that is, to prevent the subordination of the individual under an all-powerful state), we must admit that this freedom will be lost, whether the deterrent works or does not work.» (Fromm 1960c, p. 1019)

The great danger of living in a world in which a fragile peace is based on deterrence is the loss of vitality essential to survival. Connected with this is the development that freedom, individuality, and faith increasingly become empty formulas; that creative potency is realized less and less; that vitality dwindles; and that we do not follow a vision of a good life that lies beyond increased consumer needs. Talking about values becomes more and more a ritual without content (see Fromm 1960c, p. 1020; Fromm 1970h, p. 245).

Even if a world full of harmony lies in the far distance, we need to develop ideas and visions of a social togetherness in the foreseeable future that leaves room for the expression of the human potential.

In this sense, Erich Fromm already called for a revolution of hope in 1968 — in a climate of social upheaval. He reiterated this in 1970:

«It has often been shown in history that ideas, confronted with lack of ideas, can have an unexpected penetrating power. What we need is a new attitude, (...) an avoidance of all sentimentality, of all irrationality, combined with faith in real possibilities. This is precisely the paradox of hope: hope is neither a passive waiting for something that may never come, nor a forcing of what cannot come at the moment. It is difficult to live with the paradox of hope, but that, in my opinion, is the only possibility for all of us.» (Fromm 1970h, p. 257.)

In the face of omnipresent, serious global problems and catastrophes, which are evident even beyond wars and increasing armament and are becoming continuously more evident, it may be surprising if it is precisely hope that is emphasized as an important point of reference for peace psychology. For when these problems are discussed publicly and scientifically, they are usually associated with horror scenarios in which scientific justification and urgency are not to be questioned; be it climate change or be it social inequalities and gaps between rich and poor.

And yet, following Fromm, one must point to the dangers of a social world in which «renunciation» and conscious self-mortification as imagined villains disturbing the balance of nature become the only, or at least increasingly hegemonic, vision of human existence. Even if de-growth is spoken of as a social challenge, a perspective is needed that not only pays attention to reduction, but locates and emphasizes growth differently and more humanly. For according to Fromm, hope is «a psychic concomitant to life and growth» (Fromm 1968a, p. 12).

In his book *The Revolution of Hope* he writes in this regard:

«Hope and faith, being essential qualities of *life*, are by their very nature moving in the direction of transcending the *status quo*, individually and socially. It is one of the qualities of all life that it is in a constant process of change and never remains the same at any given moment. Life that stagnates tends to die; if the stagnation is complete, death has occurred. It follows that life in its moving quality tends to break out of and to overcome the *status quo*. (...)

What holds true for the individual holds true for a society. It is never static; if it does not grow, it decays; if it does not transcend the *status quo* for the better, it

changes for the worse. Often we, the individual or the people who make up a society, have the illusion we could stand still and not alter the given situation in the one or the other direction. This is one of the most dangerous illusions. The moment we stand still, we begin to decay.» (Fromm 1968a, p. 16.)

4. Toward a humanized technology from a perspective of peace psychology

But what should this hope be directed towards and what can we lean on in these difficult times? In this respect, too, I think it is promising to follow Fromm from a peace-psychological point of view.

For his book *The Revolution of Hope*, published in 1968, Fromm chose the subtitle «toward a humanized technology». I think it is important for peace psychology to turn to questions of technological progress. For reasons of time alone, I can only briefly outline my thoughts on this here.

On the one hand, Erich Fromm already points out the essential dangers that arise with advancing technological development. This is even more evident today than it was 50 years ago. For in view of a widespread pessimistic-resignative basic attitude towards the future of the planet and a view devaluing the own human self, a glorification of technology is obvious; looking longingly at artificial intelligence as a supposedly superior force to man, or indulging in necrophilous tendencies when a few of these human troublemakers are wiped out by carefully constructed high-tech weapons.

Fromm sees the associated attraction to the non-living and indifference to life as a major cause of destructive agency.

«Concerning the theory of society, I would like to make only one point, namely, the fact that in the period of the second industrial revolution society has created very definite conditions which lead to the multiplication of human aggressiveness. I mean here, first of all, the growing separation between affect and intellect. In my opinion, we are slowly approaching a development of mild but chronic schizophrenia, which expresses itself precisely in this split between affect and thought. The result is not only hostility but also indifference to life. But indifference to life, perhaps even more than destructiveness, is one of the most dangerous causes of people's willingness to destroy others and themselves. It should not be taken lightly in the discussion of peace.» (Fromm 1970h, p. 251.)

Helmut Johach (2013) follows Fromm and points out the dangers of increasing deadening in societies. If wars are served to us by the media as a reality show already at breakfast, and the more warfare is controlled by technology and electronics and is dissociated from the destruction caused, then the more the feeling for the living is dulled. That we should not accept this is the message with which Fromm wants to pull people out of their indifference.

Therefore, peace psychology should turn to technological progress and how people interact in an increasingly digitalized and cybernated social world. Rainer Funk (2011a, 2011b) recognized this long ago when he critically examined the increasing experience of dissolution of boundaries in the context of the social character of ego-orientation. It is precisely such investigations of social characters that are an important task for future peace psychology.

Both Funk and Fromm, however, are not enemies of technological progress. Just as a view of the world oriented exclusively toward renunciation and self-mortification is incapable of preserving or promoting human vitality, a nostalgic transfiguration of a world without technical gadgets is incapable of doing so.

Rather, it must be a matter of paving a way for urgently needed hope precisely through increasingly humanized technology. Although Fromm distances himself from false optimism, he himself draws this connection between technological progress and increased possibilities of lasting peace:

«For the very same reasons, there is a real chance for the future abolition of war, a chance that never existed in the past. In most of man's history, the improvement of his material situation required an increase in human energy (slaves), additional land for cattle raising or agriculture, or new sources of raw materials. The techniques of the present and of the future will permit an increase in material wealth by an increased industrial and — indirectly — an agricultural productivity, without the need of enslaving or robbing others. At present and in the future, war would have as its only »rationale« the irrationality of human desire for power and conquest.» (Fromm 1960c, p. 1021 fn.)

In this sense, a humanistic-psychoanalytical peace research should strive for more visibility in debates about the growing importance of artificial intelligence (Kühn 2022).

The elaboration of dangers should not be the end point of the debate on the use of AI. Rather, the point must be to use this sensitivity to turn to the possibilities technological advancements offer and to consider how further technological progress should be shaped and steered to promote a society adapted to human needs. Fromm sums this up as follows:

«The general aim of a humanized industrial society can be thus defined: the change of the social, economic, and cultural life of our society in such a way that it stimulates and furthers the growth and aliveness of man rather than cripples it; that it activates the individual rather than making him passive and receptive; that our technological capacities serve man's growth.» (Fromm 1968a, pp. 95 f.)

5. Final remarks: Strengthening a humanistic peace psychology and collective peace movement

To conclude this article, I would like to take a step back. For, given the challenges described in the introduction and in the context of a war raging in the midst of Europe, peace psychology should not, of course, limit itself to looking at alternative ways of growth involving technological progress. Pressing contemporary questions are linked to the daily bloodshed in Eastern Europe.

Specifically, there is both the question of what way out might arise from a peace psychology perspective to end the war as soon as possible, and the question of how we, as citizens of a country that is not directly a party to the war but has positioned itself politically, can deal with the ongoing war.

Regarding the first question, following Fromm, different answers can generally be formulated and thought. This also becomes clear in the way Erich Fromm Prize winners react to the war in different ways. While Konstantin Wecker, for example, speaks of the enduring power of pacifism and advocates nonviolent resistance (Käßmann & Wecker 2022), Paul Mason defends and justifies both resistance with weapons by Ukraine and the supply of weapons and intelligence by states not directly involved in the war (Mason 2022).

Fromm himself did not describe himself as a pacifist, but considered it right for people in certain situations to sacrifice their lives by offering nonviolent or violent resistance (see Fromm 1960c, p. 1025). Whether the current war is such a situation is quite debatable, as the above example illustrates. The associated field of discourse is characterized by contrary positions.

With Fromm, however, two important insights can nevertheless be highlighted. First, Fromm makes clear that a view that reduces the end of a war to the question of victory and defeat falls short and is dangerous. Rather, a perspective is needed on how the coexistence of the warring parties can be shaped after the war. This perspective must also take into account, in particular, the people who belong to a country that is not clearly victorious (see also Johach 2013):

«It must be the goal of peace strategy, as opposed to war strategy — and this is essential — to avoid the defeat of the enemy. (...) If in the so-called Cold War or in diplomacy one tries to inflict as many defeats as possible on the opponents, then this leads to only one result, that the politics of the opponent hardens — either in the form of a new set of hawks coming to power, or that the people, who until now had peaceful tactics, change their tactics in the sense of the hawks. (...) The only strategy of peace is the recognition of mutual interests.» (Fromm 1970h, p. 252.)

Fromm emphasizes the importance of opening up to dialogue: «We must understand, explain, and enlighten» (Ibid., p. 256). At a conference following his lecture, he explains this with the following example. The Bolsheviks in St. Petersburg in 1917 would have addressed the tsarist soldier not as «You pigs,» but as «You are our brothers,» and would have enlightened him about their movement. Peace work, Fromm argued, could never succeed if one could not speak to those people in whom the humanist tradition was still alive, who felt repelled by fanaticism, and who had learned to speak another language. (Fromm 1970h, p. 445).

Secondly — and this seems to me to be particularly important in view of the split in the peace movement observed at the outset — Fromm, in reflecting on different attitudes toward pacifism and nonviolent forms of resistance, stresses that the primary concern should not be to emphasize the differences, but to become aware of the common humanist foundation:

«The difference between these two groups, however, is not as fundamental as it may seem. They are united by their critical attitude toward the irrational aspects of international politics and by their deep reverence for life. They share the conviction of the oneness of the human race and faith in the spiritual and intellectual potentialities of man. They follow the dictates of their conscience (...). As warfare becomes at once more senseless and more devastating, the convergence between religious pacifist, humanist, and pragmatic opponents to nuclear armament grows.» (Fromm 1960c, pp. 1017 f.)

Only this common foundation can form the basis for a re-energized peace movement.

When it comes to the second question about our daily dealings with the everyday life of war, first the willingness to help and to engage in dialogue have to be emphasized. In addition to the willingness to help people directly

affected by war, such as refugees, this willingness to engage in dialogue requires respectful treatment of those who think differently. According to Pulisic (2015, p. 156), the appreciation of a «community of otherness» is a matter of collective survival in a world full of pressing global problems. He associates this with acceptance and willingness to dialogue without regard to perceived differences between social groups (see also Kühn & Bobeth 2022).

In my opinion, the recognition of one's own uncertainty and polyphony in the sense of inner readiness for dialogue presupposes the basis for such a dialogue with those who think differently. Not only does the social brutalization of the discourse around war pose a danger, which has already been referred to several times in this article, but so does one's own loss of sensitivity and one's own brutalization; both of which can be connected with a subjectively felt pressure to take a stand and an increasing black-and-white thinking, particularly if the experience of one's own polyphony, contradictoriness and helplessness threatens one's own self-experience. Such polyphony can be found empirically, for example, in the way German citizens experience their own national affiliation (Kühn 1999, 2000, 2001a, 2001b). From a psychodynamic perspective, the stigmatizing finger-pointing at others in this context appears as a projective defense against one's own insecurities and fears (Kühn 2001b)⁸. But allowing this polyphony can counteract an increasing polarization in societies and strengthen one's own capacity for dialogue.

However, this acceptance of one's own polyphony must by no means be equated with arbitrarily following other positions in one's own openness. On the contrary, even in the face of concrete armed conflicts, such as the one in Ukraine, and the positions associated with them, it is important to remain critical of simplistic resolutions of complex issues and possible idolatries in the name of peace. If, for example, international law and the sovereignty of states are emphasized, the legitimacy of such argumentations with regard to possible alternatives for action in concrete conflict situations should not be questioned in principle. Likewise, from a humanistic, peace-psychological perspective, caution is called for when it comes, for example, to the naturalization of a world divided into nations; which is, after all, a historical and social invention. Fromm sharply dissociates himself from this interpretation:

8 Ulrich Bröckling (2022: 442, translation by me) also argues in this way: «Those who, on the other hand, brush aside doubts and demonstrate determination immediately feel stronger. It is not least this relief that drives the switch to heroic mode. The horror of war and the impossibility of ending it from afar are easier to bear as long as people call for even more weapons and demand unconditional solidarity with the Ukrainian defenders of the homeland.»

«Nationalism as well as tribalism are precisely the opposite [of humanism]. There we are not in touch with humanity. We are only in touch with one sector of humanity.» (Fromm 1992m, p. 78)

The question of how to advocate, in the spirit of positive peace, for a world in which humanity, justice, and community can be realized beyond nation-states must not be lost sight of. This implies sensitivity to one's own use of language. Again, the reference to violations of «international law» is not meant to be questioned in principle — it may be useful when it comes to guaranteeing protection and to stopping an arbitrary, violent disregard of civil rights in a world full of states in one way or another. But we do not live in a world where there is a global, democratically legitimized system of law or rules between different people or peoples. The image of «international law» should therefore also be reflected upon in terms of the colonial history of the current world order, as well as the unequal power relations between nations, in order to avoid making global power differences and their threat to peace invisible through one's use of language. In this regard, Pulisik (2015, p. 155) points to dangers of what he calls American hegemony, which poses a challenge to humanistic psychology, especially when it is associated with the development of an «enduring warfare state,» while at the same time acting as a normative reference for democratic systems worldwide:

«Moreover, efforts to target suspected individuals have come to rely on unmanned drones, sent from afar, with capacities to kill as well. Privacy has been sacrificed, and the increased capacity to kill from remote distances poses a new challenge to humanistic psychology. How does our profession react not only to harm inflicted on individuals in particular wars but also to the evolution of an enduring warfare state.» (Pulisik 2015, p. 156.)

Of course, this must not lead to the relativization of murderous violence, as it was initiated by the Russian regime in 2022. At the same time, however, there is a need for critical questioning of hegemonic structures in the world and their significance for the status quo of democracy(ies). It is in this sense that Pulisik is to be understood, pointing out that awareness among the population is the prerequisite for a humanistic transformation. In this sense, peace psychology contributes to raising people's awareness of what should be changed.

Fromm also argues in this direction. According to him, an important task is to work out new possibilities for a participatory democracy that enables as many people as possible to participate in the democratic process (Fromm 1970h, p. 256). This corresponds to his concept of positive freedom, which

enables and encourages people to develop their own possibilities and to live actively and spontaneously. It is precisely in this that he locates the difference to fascist regimes:

«There is one way to define the real meaning of the difference between democracy and Fascism. Democracy is a system that creates the economic, political, and cultural conditions for the full development of the individual. Fascism is a system that, regardless under which name, makes the individual subordinate to extraneous purposes and weakens the development of genuine individuality.» (Fromm 1941a, p. 272.)

Accordingly, in the sense of a psychology of peace, everyday life requires a commitment to a transformation towards a development of society in the direction which, in Fromm's sense, promotes not having but being, with which the willingness to share and to give can be linked. Such a development cannot be initiated by individuals alone, but requires a collective in the form of a strengthened and renewed peace movement that overcomes its present division.

The task of such a peace movement was summed up by Fromm in 1970 as follows:

«A peace movement can only be successful if it points beyond itself as a peace movement and becomes a movement of radical humanism, if it is able to appeal to the whole human being — to people who suffer from that lack of aliveness which this industrial society produces — if it can show a vision of a new society and a new human being. (...) In the long run, only a radical transformation of society can create a lasting peace.» (Fromm 1970h, p. 252.)

In the same year, Fromm describes the prospects for peace as «statistically not good». My impression is that this is no different today. At the same time, however, in view of the widespread awareness of the need for global transformation, Fromm's immediately following statement is to be agreed with, namely that there are still chances (Fromm 1970h, p. 256).

In order for these chances to be used, it would be important, following Fromm, both that there is a mobilization of large masses of people who put pressure on rulers against waging war, and that a vision of a social togetherness is developed and demonstrated that is humane, not based on bureaucratic administration, and creates opportunities for people to actively participate. Peace psychology is called upon, even today, in addition to contributions to the de-escalation of contemporary armed conflicts, to concern itself with oth-

er possible forms of global human togetherness than that which is currently represented by various nation-states with a considerable imbalance of power. In this sense, Fromm deserves the final word of my contribution:

«This includes a systematic and intensive attempt to de-idolize the idols I spoke of earlier. As long as man worships idols, he is not able to think and act as a free man who affirms his life and the life of others. (...) With the negation of idols or with the struggle against them is related the de-escalation of hatred and violence. I believe that the hatred and violence, even in the service of peace, only serve the hatred and violence. In an age in which we are most closely bound and limited in our possibilities, namely in the age of nuclear weapons, the unleashing of hatred and violence, whatever ends it serves, is dangerous to peace.» (Fromm 1970h, p. 252).

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