



Suvajevs\_I\_2015

## Erich Fromm and Latvia. Summary

Igors Šuvajevs

“Erich Fromm and Latvia. Summary,” was first published in: I. Suvajevs (Ed.), *Begsana no brivibas? Erihs Fromms un Latjija*, Riga (University of Latvia, Institute of Philosophy and Sociology) 2014, pp. 217-220. Reprint in: *Fromm Forum* (English Edition – ISBN 1437-1189), 19 / 2015, Tuebingen (Selbstverlag), pp. 60-61.

Copyright © 2015 by Prof. Dr. Igors Šuvajevs, University of Lettland, Institute of Philosophy, Riga, LV-1050, Latvia; E-Mail: igorss[at-symbol]lu.lv. Translation from Latvian by Jānis Vējš.

The name of Erich Fromm was mentioned for the first time in Latvian public discourse in 1931. It is possible that he was not completely unknown in Latvia during the thirties. Besides, Fromm's presence in Latvia need not be directly textual, general dissemination of his views may be probable at that time. As from the end of the thirties, a period of deep silence about Fromm's views sets in. This situation was only partly overcome at the end of the seventies. The change took place in a very tentative manner, and his voice is not fully audible yet.

The origins of the present collective monograph go back to the year of 2013, when an international conference *Freedom and Liberties—Possibilities and Dangers* was held in Riga in cooperation with the International Erich Fromm Society, and was greatly facilitated by the contribution of the last assistant of Erich Fromm and proprietor of his copyright, Rainer Funk. Psychoanalysts, philosophers and psychologists from Germany, Mexico and Latvia were involved. The conference was patronized by Ex-President of Latvia *Vaira Vīķe-Freiberga*, who shared her intellectual experience with Fromm. Thus, the idea of a collective monograph came to fruition, concentrating attention on Fromm within the context of psychoanalysis and phenomenology.

The collective monograph consists of five parts. The first part deals with Fromm's life

and ideas. In the second part Fromm is viewed in the context of Latvia, while the third part draws attention one concentrates attention to the psychoanalysis and philosophy of Fromm. The fourth part—so far the most extensive one—consists of a translation of parts of Fromm's *Escape from Freedom*. The fifth part contains a short life-course description of Fromm and a list of his publications.

*Helmut Johach* presents the biography of Fromm in connection with the development of his ideas. He writes about Fromm's family, the education he obtained, his Jewish background. Fromm was born in an Orthodox Jewish family, yet later in his life he took an interest in the Hasidic and Prophetic traditions. Fromm's life in USA and in Mexico is also described, so is his seniority period, spent in Switzerland. *Rainer Funk* develops the ideas of Fromm with special reference to the topicality of his work *Escape from Freedom* (1941). He touches briefly on the problem of freedom in Western society and discusses in detail the role of freedom in Fromm's psychology. Funk stresses that Fromm was the first psychologist to undertake the analysis of the problem of freedom with regard to modern people. He dwells, in particular, on the present-day challenges of freedom; he speaks of freedom as emancipation in contrast to “Entgrenzung” (delimitation, unboundedness) as a characteristic feature of the modern Ego-orientated soci-



ety. Funk concludes by pointing out the unlimited freedom in order not to get aware of a deep rooted fear of reality.

*Maija Kūle* writes about freedom in present-day Latvia in the light of Fromm's analytical social psychology; she touches on some of the latest cases of socio-political events. Kūle demonstrates both the similarities and the differences of the spiritual, intellectual approach of Fromm and the stance of the Latvian intellectuals. She discusses, in particular, the religious awakening in Latvia and writes about some of the personalities within the context of the freedom of Latvia. Kūle is also deliberating about the verbalization of the thoughts about freedom and the linguistic usage as a strategy for survival. *Solveiga Krūmiņ-Koņkova* tackles a theme which so far wasn't examined—namely, the comparison of Fromm and Steiner within the context of Latvian intellectual life. She notes that both thinkers were concerned with freedom. Basing her research on archival sources, as she does, Krūmiņ-Koņkova discusses the ways and means whereby Steiner has made an impact on the Latvian spiritual ethos.

*Igors Šuvajevs* discusses the viability of Fromm's teaching in Latvia. He distinguishes between such phenomena as freedom, freedoms and liberation. Šuvajevs speaks about persisting character traits in Latvia described by Fromm. Those being such devices as periodical flight from freedom, and formation of ever-new escapades. He discusses some elements of respective discursive practices and their manifestations. In the end of the article Šuvajevs discusses the art of living or the art of being as discernable in Fromm.

*Ieva Stūre-Stūriņa* discusses such notions as flight and the death-wish with special reference to sadomasochism and destructiveness. She compares Fromm's contribution with that of Freud's, concerning the relevant contacts between the two teachings and marking the existing differences. *Anne Sauka* discusses Fromm's notions of „to be” and „to have” within the context of the ethics of Selfhood. She draws attention to an inner contradiction within Fromm's humanism, and proposes a new kind of interpretation of his

views by accentuating the phenomenology of the body. Her radicalized interpretation involves a reframing of Fromm's views and accentuates some of the aspects of the selfhood of the body (the actual presence of the body, the illusory character of the body, the intrinsic ethicality of the body). At the very end Fromm's uses of the body are discussed in the Art-of-Life context. At the same time Anne Sauka discusses Fromm in connection with Nietzsche. Notion of the estrangement of the human being within the socially determined network, as opposed to Dionysian state, is also touched upon. Sauka discusses both the common lines of thought of Fromm and Nietzsche, as well as she marks the differences between them.

*Māris Kūlis* discusses the problem of truth. He draws special attention to the Latvian thinkers Pauls Dāle and Konstantīns Raudive applying to them the concept of optimal truth, which reminds of pragmatic approach. Kūlis holds that Fromm's most essential contribution towards that end is concerned with the person's role in truth-formation, and is revealed in the solution of every-day problems. *Anda Kande* is discussing Fromm's ideas within the context of the Stoa notion of art-of-life philosophy. She stresses, in particular, the problem of determinism and the possibility of freedom. Kande's solution takes the form of art-of-life philosophy approach, by concentrating on such notions as choice, will, and self-confidence. She accentuates the strategy of self-redeeming, characteristic of the Stoa philosophy, by identifying in Fromm such features as love, including self-love. *Edijs Šauers* attempts to amalgamate the teachings of Fromm and Kant by accentuating the problem of freedom and love; he discusses some of the differences between the two thinkers and deals with similarities between them. Šauers discusses such themes as objectivity of another person, emancipation from narcissism, rational belief, self-knowledge and emotional attitude towards the self.

The collective monograph is completed by a translation of parts of Fromm's book *Escape from Freedom* into Latvian as well as a short



Propriety of the Erich Fromm Document Center. For personal use only. Citation or publication of material prohibited without express written permission of the copyright holder.

Eigentum des Erich Fromm Dokumentationszentrums. Nutzung nur für persönliche Zwecke. Veröffentlichungen – auch von Teilen – bedürfen der schriftlichen Erlaubnis des Rechteinhabers.

list of the data of Fromm's life-course and his bibliography. Thus, the topicality of Fromm's teaching in Latvia may be said to be established, though the translation of his works is only in a nascent stage. The translation of psychoanalytical texts is not just a mechanical repetition of some words and phrases. Every translation requires relevant terminological, conceptual efforts. Understanding of such a text confronts us with new problems, which have remained obscure when reading the original version. Therefore translation of Fromm's works enhances the topicality of his thought and fosters the interpretative efforts within the Latvian culture.

Erich Fromm is a many-sided, versatile thinker, whose ideas have an impact on the formation of modern life-style in general. Yet, one of the aspects deserve special accentuation—that of the art of living, or the art of being. This concept goes to reveal the trans-therapeutical significance of Fromm's psychoanalysis. Already in his early work *Man for Himself* (1947a) Fromm postulates the idea of ethics as an art-of-life, enabling a person to be both an artist and an artefact of his/her own life course. This has to do with the formation of self-being and self-sustaining. It is this field where the views of Fromm are still very topical, indeed.